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**THE
PRESTONS**

THE PRESTONS

Memoir BY
MARY HEATON VORSE

^ AUTHOR OF =

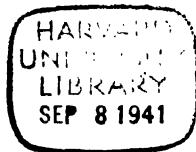
"THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN ELDERLY WOMAN,"
"THE HEART'S COUNTRY," "THE BREAKING IN
OF A YACHTSMAN'S WIFE," ETC.

NEW YORK
BONI AND LIVERIGHT
1918

~~V 918 p~~

KD 4464

1.35



First Printing November, 1918
Second Printing December, 1918

THE PRESTONS

CHAPTER I

THERE are some mornings in early summer when it seems to me that the beauty of things wakes me and calls to me. I make a hasty toilet and go gently downstairs before any of the family is up, and take possession of my house and all that belongs to it. The new-washed aspect of the earth and the long inverted shadows of early morning and the crystal freshness give the world a legendary aspect. Every time I see life from the vantage of dawn, I vow never again to miss the first morning rapture of things—and then I never waken early for a month of Sundays.

I went down one such morning and peered into the library on the left. There, lying on a little silk wrap of my daughter Edith's, was Piker, Jimmie's dog—and an uglier animal I have yet to lay my eyes on. He is a long dog, modelled after the graceful proportions of a barrel. At every corner nobbly legs are put on, dachshund fashion. His sparse yellow bristles are always coming out

all over everything and I made no doubt but that he had spread them all over the lounge where my husband would pick them up on his clothes when next he lay down there.

Piker has a snubby, impudent nose and cocky ears. Nowhere was there a trace of beauty or blood: nowhere even a far-off hint of gentle connections. The intelligence of the gutter sparkles from this dog, beloved of our family. He opened one brown eye at me and thumped his lazy tail apologetically. His tail is long and thick and makes a noise like a policeman's club when he raps it on the floor. This apologetic wag and his one open eye seemed to mark my place in my family.

"Ah, come on!" he seemed to say, "Maria would have driven me off; Henry, my oldest master, would have disturbed me, but you, mother of this house, you are too soft-hearted. Turn away your eyes from me and let me have one more nap. Pretend that you don't see, as you have so many times before, that I'm not in my own bed. Remember how I am chivied around from place to place by all the rest of the family."

I turned my head away and went out on the piazza and stood under the Virginia creeper, looking at the incredible freshness of the morning. Piker, the worthless, joined me, stretching one

leg after another and yawning the top of his big mouth almost off.

I looked at the neighbours' comfortable sleeping houses with contentment; elm trees rear their proud, graceful heads over our four corners; a procession of linden walks up a gentle hill, and back from the road, stood placid homes, dwelt in by kindly folks, all of whom I had known for years. I know there are dozens of towns in the middle west as pretty as ours, but I could never love another place with the same intimacy. Down the hill I could see the Bakers' pigeons circling about. It seemed to me that life had its moment of enchantment and only the kind and good things could at that moment show their faces. I walked around the piazza and looked down the green lawn sparkling in the early morning.

On the piazza were lemonade glasses left, some of them left on the floor where they could quite easily be stepped upon. That meant my daughter Edith and some of her friends. Edith is just in high school; she is at that age when a girl is full of a stern nobility which shows itself in sitting upon her brothers and treating her parents with contemptuous, patronising affection.

I picked up the glasses and carried them into Seraphy's spotless kitchen and paused a moment to look around at its bright perfection and con-

sider how blessed I was among women that I should have had this priceless woman as my cook since my eldest son, Osborn, was a baby. Perhaps it is on Seraphy's account that I am too soft towards my children and do not, as my sister Maria says, put down my foot often enough. I suppose the years have passed by with so much of pleasantness that it is easier for me to see the events of life unfold themselves than to try and mould them too much. How much can any one mould them, anyway? We cannot control the weather of the spirit. Sometimes I think the only thing we can do for our children is to be as good as we can ourselves and see that they are healthy and that all our precepts are but vain words.

^p I was thinking these things as I washed up the lemonade glasses, having heard an altercation the night before between Edith and Seraphy concerning the waste of lemons. I smiled at myself as I did so, knowing myself to be pusillanimous again and going in the line of least resistance which means in the line of preserving the peace of the family.

I came back to the library and shook the rug out on the piazza to get rid of Piker's hairs, but Edith's wrap I left ostentatiously out for her to hang up, so that weak-mindedness could not en-

tirely call me its own. At that moment I caught sight of a ray of sunshine streaming through the petals of flowers in the front living room. I decided that this was no morning for discipline and hung up Edith's wrap.

I started to straighten up the library. Lying on the floor was a notebook over which I had seen Jimmie toiling the night before, writing out observations on his guinea-pigs. He has two of these uninteresting animals whose habits he is observing. This memorandum read:

2 p. m. Guinea-pigs sleeping.

2.30 Still sleeping.

3 p. m. Running around cage (I poked them with a stick).

3.15 p. m. Eating.

Note: Guinea-pigs eat with persistence.

Note: The habits of guinea-pigs is monotonous.

I saw by this notebook that Jimmie had again been misled by one of those glittering books by naturalists where all the high points of a year's study are compressed into one short article. He still touchingly believes the things he reads in books. He lives a dual life. Part of him is at the cave-dwelling age, at the age of tribal warfare, of the invention of the primitive implements, when man scorns woman as an inferior.

Part of his life is passed in the stern, clear-eyed passion of scientific pursuit.

Now my eyes lit upon an ash-tray. In it were the ashes of a cigar and of three cigarettes. I had gone to bed leaving Osborn and his father in the library. Osborn is my oldest son who is going to college next year. I stood and smiled over this tell-tale tray. Osborn and his father were smoking together and Henry was apparently keeping from my idealistic nature the sad fact that my son smoked. There are times, of course, when I lean upon my husband, as a wife is supposed to do. There are other times when it seems to me he is as guileless as my boys. I had known when Osborn began to smoke, nor had it been to me the tragedy that such events are pictured in books of fiction.

Boys have to begin some time. I smiled over the artless butts. They made it a little ritual of confidence together, after female morality had withdrawn itself to bed. There was something about them that touched me deeply. I could see them puffing solemnly together, partaking of the communion that men share together and of which they are so jealous.

I wondered if Maria, my sister, knew that Osborn smoked and if she thought I ought to "take steps." My dear sister has a touching belief that

almost everything can be cured by two mysterious processes. One is known as Nipping Things in the Bud and the other is Taking Steps.

Maria brought me up, and when I married she came to help bring up my children. What a help she was when they were all little together. But since they are grown up she clucks anxiously after them like a hen whose chickens have turned out to be ducklings.

Having straightened the house I sat out in the fresh morning air—it still had a crystal freshness. The feeling of home enveloped me. A curious sensation of safety—not so much that I was safe as that the children were, and I could still mother them all under my wings. Their foibles, that sometimes in moments of stress irritated me, charmed me and had even a touching quality, since it represented them.

I imagined the day flowing along with the peaceful beauty of the morning, the family working harmoniously together. Then, as I sat there, clouds sped over the sky and oppressive moist heat shut down over us. Thunder growled in the distance and I was glad that I had seen the day begin so gallantly, for rain was upon us. The house, too, had awakened and noises came drifting from the kitchen. I realised that it was time to get ready for breakfast.

CHAPTER II

I HAD not quite finished my second dressing when Seraphy knocked on my door and began talking from the moment she knocked.

“Of course, it’s yersilf that buys all th’ pots and pans, but as I sez to Jimmie, it’s hurryin’ to the sthore we’ll have to be or we won’t have a thing left to cook in over Sunda’. When I says to him, ‘Yer ma won’t like it,’ he goes right on—and me with th’ waffles on and him underfoot! An’ I wouldn’t care a bit, but it was me best omelet spider that he was usin’ for it—and now it’s rooned f’rever.

“An’ what he wants to be meltin’ bullets f’r, anyway, I don’t understand, an’ him spillin’ the solder all over everything an’ sayin’ he’s goin’ to be mendin’ holes. An’ all I say is, if the fresh Tyler kid wants to be meltin’ up lead, why don’t he melt it in his ma’s kitchen, an’ take Jimmie with him, instid o’ bein’ always in *my* kitchin!

“It’s ’cause ye’s so soft, Mrs. Preston, that’s the matter with them kids. There isn’t another woman’s best omelet spider in this town that’s bein’ used f’r meltin’ lead, you can lay your bets on that. An’ them with their fingers in me new

lard-pail usin' it to grease up bullet-moulds—it's makin' bullets as big as your thumb they are this minute—an' me gettin' breakfast—an' smellin' awful whin th' lard burns up.

“An' what's scalded me heart is that Miss Maria comes down an' sez, ‘Seraphy, you've been a cook too long to let the lard burn like this,’ and goes off before I can say yes or no! Then she opens th' slide from the dinin'-room an' sticks her head in an' sez, ‘Burnin' lard is awful dang'rous, Seraphy—you'll have us afire.’ An' after all th' years I've been in this family to have Miss Maria talkin' like that, with them limbs under-foot. They started in just as soon as th' kitchen fire was lit, so they did!”

I made the mistake here of asking:

“Why didn't you send them away, Seraphy?”
“Sind them away. It's only with th' harrud end of th' broom I could sind them away. I sez to Jimmie, ‘Jimmie, can't ye get out?’ an' he sez, ‘Seraphy, keep on y'r hair,’ an' Tom Tyler—an' he's the fresh kid, sez, ‘Yes, Seraphy, keep y'r shirt on.’ An' I says to Jimmie, ‘I ain't worked f'r eighteen years for y'r Ma to be sassed be two fresh kids while I'm gettin' th' breakfast. Clear out!’ sez I.

“‘How do I clear?’ sez Jimmie, an' ‘Tell us how it's done,’ sez Tom—yis, ma'am, that's what

he sez. An' Jimmie sez to me, 'Seraphy, you've no patriotism. Here we're makin' bullets t' defend y'r fatherland, an' you talk about breakfast to us!'

" 'An', I sez, " 'Little you care f'r breakfast, an' I know why—you've filled y'rselves so plum full of all th' doughnuts that was left that y'r near busted, an' drunk a good pint of coffee on me, too.' An' Tom Tyler sez, 'The laborer is worthy of his hire.' If 'twasn't f'r all the bad boys that's surroundin' him, Jimmie'd be only as fierce as he is this minute. An' Jimmie sez, 'Yes, the stag at eve had drunk his fill'—you wouldn't believe, ma'am, how they go on when you're not there! And then it was Miss Maria come out at me and I come right upstairs."

By this time I had finished dressing and went down to settle the boys.

"What's this," I asked Jimmie sternly, "that Seraphy tells me about your annoying her while she was getting breakfast?"

The Tyler boy had discreetly vanished—I suppose at the sound of my approaching footsteps. Jimmie only replied:

"Father told me I might—he said I could melt all the bullets I wanted to and he told me how they did it in the Revolutionary War."

"Well," I replied, "your father didn't say you

could be impertinent to Seraphy nor spoil the best skillet. And very well I know, Jimmie, why you began so early in the morning."

"Of course," Jimmie gave back bitterly, "I began early so I shouldn't be stopped. Every time a fellow wants to do anything, he's stopped!"

"You shouldn't," I replied, "do things you know you're going to be stopped doing."

To which Jimmie retorted:

"There ain't nothin' I know I can do that I wouldn't be stopped doin' that's any fun."

For this I had no answer.

I sighed. I wished that we were back in my mother's day when there were no theories to contend with. I can well remember my mother saying, "Now we've got rid of the boys for the day we can accomplish something." I can also remember her saying: "Well, it does seem to me as if all the Saturdays were rainy and with the boys swarming all over the house as they are today——"

No, in my mother's generation there was less nonsense about many things than there is in mine. If I were to echo my mother and say, "Thank God, boys don't stay twelve years old always!" I would be considered an unnatural mother and yet, sometimes when I look at Jimmie, how I long to utter those words!

CHAPTER III

NATURALLY, breakfast was late and Henry was in a hurry. It is the rush season in the hat factory when Henry always acts as if no work could be started until his arrival. As luck would have it, he asked for an omelet, and Seraphy took this occasion of exhibiting her ruined skillet. Henry only said:

"I don't care what you cook your omelet in, Seraphy—that's your business."

At which Seraphy went away muttering ominously and I knew that I would have to smooth out the kitchen all day long. During breakfast Henry moralised on the fuss women make about little things.

"Of course," he said, "I don't say that Jimmie should use cooking utensils. But boys of Jimmie's age ought to be allowed to try experiments."

"If their experiments didn't result in their blowing their own fingers off and setting the house afire!" said Maria.

"There it is," Henry continued in that placid and superior male tone. "Women always exaggerate so that they spoil the force of their arguments."

And he went off in high good humour, leaving me to face a rainy day of unbroken Jimmie, with Maria and Seraphy both ruffed in the temper.

I escaped to my own room as soon after breakfast as I could. Soon I heard Edith disputing with her brother.

"I don't care," I heard her saying, "whether they all lock or not."

"Well, you ought to care," Jimmie remonstrated, "you might have something valuable that you wanted to lock in your closet some time. I'm going to fix all the locks in the house to-day. Nobody else cares anything about them."

"I tell you," Edith repeated, "I don't want you roosting around my room, hammering and bating. I don't *care* whether all those old doors lock or not. What difference does it make whether the door that goes into the dressing-room locks or not, or the closet door?"

"It makes a lot of difference," said Jimmie. "If you wanted to lock yourself in from attack, what would you do? There might be a robber in the house, and we need every key there is."

Edith replied: "You talk like a fool!"

Jimmie made no answer but I heard the tap-tap of his work.

Then Edith said: "*Please* go out, Jimmie, there are things I want to do."

"Go ahead and do 'em," Jimmie cheerfully agreed.

"I can't when you're here," Edith complained, "I want to read."

Edith has lately had lent her by a young man a number of deep works which she was going to tackle. As I passed the door she appealed to me, saying:

"Mother, does Jimmie need to spend the whole morning breaking all the locks in my room?"

"I'm not bustin' 'em; I'm mendin' 'em. I'm oiling all the locks and fitting the keys in—they're in an awful condition."

"I don't want to lock things," Edith complained, "I want you to go out of my room. I don't want you sitting around my room all day, fixing locks to four old doors. It doesn't seem to me," Edith went on, "that I can stand you another minute in the room."

Jimmie continued to tap-tap-tap on the locks.

"You're a disagreeable little thing!" cried Edith.

"I'd rather be that than a nervous girl like you," Jimmie replied.

Here Edith appealed to me, and justice made me tell Jimmie that, after all, his sister's room belonged to her; so Jimmie gathered up his tools and went downstairs.

Presently I heard Maria's voice in the hall exclaiming:

"Heavens, Jimmie, it's dropping all over the new carpet! Oh, don't wipe it up with that dirty handkerchief—now you've made a dreadful stain—you're making it bigger every minute—stop rubbing it with that dirty rag!"

I thought it time for me to go to the scene of battle and I heard Maria's voice again, shrilly:

"You've got that oil all over my new dress—a great, long stain of it!"

"What's this?" I asked.

"I don't know what it is," replied Maria. "It's some nonsense of Jimmie's."

"I was oiling the lock," Jimmie explained sullenly.

"He means he's been pouring quarts of oil into keyholes," Maria amended. "It's all run down and he's got a great pool of it on your carpet, and I brushed against a door and spotted my new dress, and I do think, Editha, that Jimmie might have other occupations than ruining my dress and your carpet."

"I'm just fixing the locks," Jimmie told me aggrievedly. "Nothing locks in this house and nobody cares whether burglars get in."

"Fiddlesticks, get in!" replied his outraged aunt.

I looked at Jimmie. Well I knew what was going on inside his head. Here he was, engaged in a good work, and first he had been hounded out of his sister's room with rude words, and now he had been accused of ruining household goods and his aunt's clothes.

"Jimmie," I suggested, "why don't you go up and fix the bathroom lock? That one really needs fixing and it's one that's used."

His face cleared a little and he went upstairs, while I wiped off the oil that had flowed down from the locks of the other doors. Presently Jimmie got through and I heard no more of him for a while. Peace reigned in the house. I immersed myself in the Saturday mending.

But the peace was broken in on by a loud knocking. I started to my feet. The knocking came from the bathroom.

"What's the matter, Maria?" I cried.

"I can't get out," replied Maria. "No mortal force could turn this key. That's what comes of letting boys tamper with locks. I shall probably catch my death of cold—all I have with me is my kimono. I thought that now would be a good time to take a warm bath. Edith usually uses up the water at ordinary bath times, so that I seldom can get a warm bath, unless I bathe at odd times, so I thought just before dinner I'd

pop into the tub—there'd surely be plenty of hot water. . And now that I try to get out, I can't!"

"I suppose I shall have to telephone for some one to come and open the door," said I.

At this Maria gave a frightened shriek.

"Why, Editha," she expostulated, "how can you be so indelicate! How could I have a workman come and let me out and me in my kimono?"

This aspect of the case hadn't occurred to me, as Maria is well over fifty.

"It'll be bad enough to have Henry open the door; but I think that Seraphy and the rest of you might try to let me out."

At this Edith giggled.

"I heard you giggling, Miss!" cried Maria.

I shot a look at Edith which meant, "Don't enrage your aunt further," and went down for Seraphy.

"I'll just run and get Mr. Preston's tools," said she, "an' see if I can't be pryin' off the lock."

She came back presently, her face beaming.

"It's the mad man he'll be!" she exulted, "Not a hide nor hair of his tools is to be found. Yis, ma'am, they've just walked off, an' the thing he kapes 'em in has walked off, too."

"Have you looked everywhere for them, Seraphy?" I asked.

"I have that," Seraphy replied, "it's Jimmie,

that limb, has 'em. He's got one of his days today."

"Where is Jimmie?" I asked. "I told him not to go out without asking; he must be in the house."

"Well, thin, he ain't," said Seraphy, "I've looked for him——"

"I'm getting very cold," came Maria's voice. "This is no time to stop for conversation, Editha! These summer colds are very dangerous, and what's more, I want to get out of here before Henry comes. Henry, I've no doubt, will think it's humorous!"

"Why don't you bust the door open, Miss Maria?" Seraphy suggested. "Just lean th' weight of y'rsilf agin' it, an' th' lock'll go pop, like a broken bean."

To this Maria made no reply. Allusions to her weight naturally don't please her.

"The tools have got to be found," announced Maria, "I don't care where you look for them—they've *got* to be found! And instead of standing out there jabbering and letting me take my death of cold and wanting me to lacerate my flesh against a broken door, you might make some effort to find them. There! It's too late—there's Henry! Well, since he's here, he might as well let me out."

"What's all this?" asked Henry, and when I told him, as I foresaw he would, he burst into a roar of laughter.

"Laugh away!" cried Maria from her side of the door, "I expected it from you, Henry! But perhaps when you find that Jimmie's walked off with all your tools you won't think it's so funny!"

"What's that?" asked Henry sharply. His tools are the apple of his eyes. No one is allowed to touch them. Jimmie has tools of his own.

"I think," he said to me, "you might see to it that Jimmie doesn't do things of that kind." Which, you must admit, under the circumstances and after all I had been through that morning, was a trying remark to hear.

CHAPTER IV

EDITH meanwhile had been prowling around the house, looking for Jimmie. She now came in announcing:

“Jimmie’s on the roof!”

“On the roof!” we all echoed.

“An’ it rainin’ pitchforks like it is!” said Seraphy. “He’ll catch his death!”

“No, he won’t,” said Edith. “He’s got on mother’s best raincoat. He’s up there mending a leak! He’s got all the tools!”

At this piece of news Henry waited no longer but dashed up the attic stairs, the rest of us following. There lay Henry’s tools in their tall basket, Jimmie evidently having taken what he needed up on the roof with him.

Henry stuck his head out of the skylight, crying:

“What are you doing up there, Jimmie, with my tools?”

I heard a clatter and a rattle.

“Now you see what you’ve done,” exclaimed Henry with some temper, “dropped everything down into the gutter.”

I heard Jimmie grumble: “Well, it’s lucky I

didn't drop myself down, scaring me like that!"

"Don't you be impertinent to me, young man!" Henry warned his son. "You've been a nuisance all day long. Now give me my hammer and chisel—I'm going to let your aunt out of the bathroom where you've locked her in."

"I dropped 'em," said Jimmie.

By this time he was well in through the skylight and I can tell you that I was glad to see him safe inside, because our roof is no place for a boy on a rainy day.

"Oh, the turn you give us!" cried Seraphy, "settin' on that roof! An' look at y'r ma's raincoat—see what you've done to it! You might have fallen off an' got y'r neck broke!"

"I wish I had!" said Jimmie. "I'd rather have it broken off than jawed off!"

"Jimmie!" Henry warned him. "What were you doing up there, anyhow?"

"There was a great big leak," said Jimmie indignantly. "You can see where it was—look at that pan." He indicated a pan on the floor.

"It's me bread-pan!" I heard Seraphy exclaim. "I been lookin' f'r it all day."

"Nobody cares if this house busts up but me—nobody ever drives a nail but me: and I thought I'd just slip up on the roof and nail a shingle right over the leak, and I did; and my own tools

weren't the right kind, so I took yours. I didn't think, for real work in the house, you'd mind: and then you came up and scared me to death—and now I've let 'em drop down into the gutter. But I can get them out again."

All this explanation had taken up some time and in the excitement of the moment we had forgotten Maria; but we were again made aware of her predicament by doleful wails that came up and poundings on the door. We all went down and assembled outside the bathroom door.

"Are you *ever* going to let me out?" Maria moaned. "I'm chilled to the bone now!"

"If I had that chisel Jimmie dropped I could let you out in a minute—I can't do anything without a chisel."

At this I saw Seraphy smother a grin. She remembered her omelet pan of the morning.

"Chisel or no chisel," Maria proclaimed with decision, "I've got to be let out of here, if you have to saw a hole in the door. I'll stay here no longer!"

"I'll shinney down the roof and get it," Jimmie suggested.

"You'll shinney to your room!" his father remarked. "There's quite enough trouble in the house already, without your breaking a leg."

At this Jimmie disappeared. We all stood silent a moment. Then Maria wailed:

“*Are* you going to let me out or not?”

“Why, certainly, Maria—of course, we’re going to let you out,” said Henry briskly, in the tone of a man who would say: “What silly questions women ask!”

“When?” Maria wanted to know. “I’m cold.”

At this moment Seraphy came back. She had been down to the kitchen in search of some kitchen utensils that she thought might be of service in opening the lock.

“I wonder, sir,” said she, “what in all’s th’ matter with us, or if we’re afire. There’s a big crowd o’ folks watchin’ the house, standin’ under their drippin’ umbrellas. Is it th’ chimney, do you think?”

Osborn dashed in at this moment.

“Why, where are you going, Osborn?” I cried.

“I’m going up to the roof,” he returned, “to take down that youngster from it. He’s up there doing some fool thing with my best trout-rod and all the town’s looking at him—*fishing* off the roof in the rain, the young jackass! He thinks he’s too smart, that’s what ails *him!*”

So saying, my eldest son flew up to the roof. I heard him expostulating with Jimmie and Jimmie’s irate tones explaining:

"I was trying to get father's chisel—he told me not to go down and get it, and I thought I could snare it out. I haven't hurt your old rod."

"You look like an idiot, that's what you do," Osborn grumbled, "sitting on the roof fishing down into the gutter. Everybody's laughing at you. And I tell you, Jimmie, you'd better leave my things alone. You know as well as I do that a trout-rod oughtn't to be treated that way."

To this Jimmie had nothing to say. He hadn't reckoned with Osborn's being home. Osborn is his superior officer, whom he obeys in all things, even when he disobeys his father and me, and it was lése-majesty of the worst sort for Jimmie to have tampered with the sacred fishing-rod of his brother—even worse than the borrowing of his father's tools.

"If you hadn't come up just then I'd have noosed it as easy as easy," Jimmie lamented.

Poor Jimmie! He had tried to be helpful all day and no good had come of it.

Maria's voice came again through the door.

"It seems to me," she told us, "that with two grown men, a boy and three grown women, you might let me out!"

She rattled the key, pushing the handle: the key slipped in the lock, the door gave way and

Maria, draped like a Roman matron in her kimono, stood before us. At the sight of the whole family assembled, she exclaimed:

“Oh!” and retired behind the bathroom door. There’s nothing that Maria deprecates more than the modern habit of appearing before the members of one’s family in *deshabille*. The kimono has never seemed to her a garment suited for anything but one’s own privacy.

This incident had again upset the meal-hour. During the afternoon all was quiet. Edith went out and I sat down to my mending again, thinking how hard the world is for little boys, and how all through the day Jimmie had been harried from one thing to another with a series of “Don’ts” and had been reproached for everything; and all he had tried to do was to be useful.

Theoretically, a boy who would mend the locks on all the doors, oil them and after that mend the roof, would be applauded. I have read—and so has Jimmie—where such activities were praised in the young, and fathers presented bicycles to little boys after they had shown themselves inclined to be useful. In real life things do not seem to work out this way.

My reflections were broken into by Maria, who came in dressed in the starchiest of summer clothes, fanning herself.

"Have you noticed how sultry it's grown, Editha?" she said. "The house is terribly warm."

I *had* noticed that it was warm.

"You, of course, don't feel the heat as I do," said Maria, plumping down into a chair, "but it certainly is very close—though I suppose, after my exposure of this morning, I should be glad not to be suffering from chills this minute—though I've thought that perhaps I was getting a fever. Colds often come on with a fever, just as often as they do with a chill. You never can tell which way they're going to come. It's been a very shattering day, Editha, and if you think it's pleasant to catapult yourself out of the bathroom in the face of a whole sea-full of broad grins—but then, of course, I don't expect you to sympathise with me! You have so many cares of your own that I wouldn't wish to give you a moment's trouble."

At this moment Maria turned around and patted the register.

"Why, Editha!" she exclaimed. "This is warm—the register's warm!"

She turned it on. A blast of distinctly warm air came out.

"The house is afire!" Maria announced.

I let my mending fall and went over and investigated.

"It feels to me," said I, "as if some one had built a fire in the furnace."

Without a moment's hesitation Maria proclaimed:

"It's Jimmie!" She bent over and sniffed. "I smell a queer smell, too. It's like fat. Editha, there are things going on in your cellar that oughtn't to be going on!"

Maria preceded me downstairs and opened the cellar-door cautiously. I heard these words spoken in the tone of oratory:

"Fellow patriots, our ammunition is now complete. We can now meet the enemy face to face! No more shall our brave men be vanquished from lack of bullets!"

It was Eddie Baker's voice and he continued in the tone of every-day conversation:

"Just the same, Jimmie, I should think you'd have let me mould more of 'em. Just 'cause it's your bullet-mould, you needn't think you can do it all the time."

"We've got enough bullets," came Jimmie's voice. "There ain't any more lead, anyhow."

"Aw, go on, Jimmie," implored the Tyler boy, "an' mould over a few—let me mould up some."

"We got other work to do. We've gotta forge and sharpen the bayonets," Jimmie announced.

"We've got to temper the swords—you can do that, if you want to."

It was at this moment that Maria swooped down like the avenging angel.

"Jimmie Preston," she cried, "haven't you made mischief enough in this house for one day, without building furnace fires on the hottest day this summer? You rake that fire right out—put ashes on it and shut off the dampers, or whatever it is that you do to put out a furnace fire. I declare," cried my sister, turning to me, "it's too much! First, I've been frozen by Jimmie and now I've been roasted to death. What's got into that boy, I don't know."

"It's the limb he is!" said Seraphy, bringing up the rear. "Beginnin' th' day an' endin' it be smellin' th' house up on us, an' scarin' the life out've us with his old bullets."

It was at this point that Jimmie's overstrained patience gave way. All day long he had taken all the reproaches that fell on him in dogged silence. He had been chivied out of his sister's room, and reproached by his aunt for oiling the locks. Also, the onus of locking her in the bathroom fell on him, and when he had tried to stop the leak in the roof, he had only been scolded by his father and brother. Everybody was

against him and he complained loudly to the world at large.

“Where *can* I stay is what I want to know! If I go up on the roof they yank me down from there! If I stay in the cellar they pull me out of there! Where *can* I melt bullets? They won’t let me build a bonfire out of doors, and Seraphy kicks me out of the kitchen and Aunt Maria raises the dickens if I build even a teenty, weenty fire in the furnace. Where can I stay? What can I do? Oh, there ain’t nothing in this world that a feller can do and not have wimmin kick at him for!”

Which, as far as I can see, was the truth. The ways of the boy are not the ways of the grown person: and yet, he must live in this world somewhere.

“Well,” said Maria, as we came up the cellar stairs, “I suppose that while there’s a dog like Piker or a boy like Jimmie in the house, we can’t have peace this side of the grave.”

CHAPTER V

MARIA had taken Piker's measure from the first moment. When Jimmie first put Piker on the hearthrug he was then a charming puppy, yellow and fluffy as a chicken, with a little silly yellow tail that wagged so fast you couldn't see it, and all of us said the foolish things that one does to a puppy of this type or to a baby—except Maria. She put on her glasses and looked him over.

“That dog,” she announced, “is going to grow up into a hideous mongrel, Editha, one of that disgraceful kind of mongrel that one is ashamed to be seen on the street with.”

“Oh, now, Aunt Maria,” expostulated Jimmie, “he's a blooded dog—he's got fine blood in him. Why, that dog's a beagle hound.”

“I would be willing to wager,” Marie asserted, “that your beagle hound's just a plain yellow dog!” She rocked back and forth, her rocker creaking under her, looking like a monument of complacent prophecy. “If you have to get a dog,” Maria went on, “I've always said to get a good one, the kind that can be recognised.”

“So do I,” said Edith, for once agreeing with

her aunt. "It makes a house look as if poor people lived in it to see a no-account mongrel lolling on the porch with his tongue hanging out."

"If your mother has the character that I think she has," Maria amended, "this dog won't loll on the front porch whether it's a mongrel or a beagle hound. I like a dog, but I believe in his being kept in his proper place. You will have to rule this dog and rule him from the first, or the dog will rule you," Maria concluded darkly.

I don't know how we could have started in sooner than we did in trying to rule Piker. That night we made up his bed in the laundry. When he realised that he was alone and in a strange land, he opened his mouth and let out a noise that, as nearly as I can put it into writing, went:

"W-r-r-up! W-r-r-r-up! W-r-r-r-r-r-up!"

"What's that noise?" Henry demanded, after we'd all borne it in silence for a time.

"That's Jimmie's new acquisition," Maria informed him sourly.

We read on, while from the laundry came the sounds of "W-r-r-r-up! W-r-r-r-up!" Then silence. Later we learned that it was Seraphy trying to bribe Piker into silence with food unsuitable for a puppy. He ate the food, as I have good reason to remember. Soon, however, he re-

sumed his plaint. It had a patient note to it. One felt that as long as there was life in Piker he would be able to say "Wr-r-r-r-up!" Henry turned to me sternly.

"We may as well break that dog in to-night. We'll have to stand his yelling for a little while; then he'll get over it." From his manner one would have gathered that I had been urging him to let Piker out: in reality I had said nothing.

When we went to bed Piker was still howling.

It must have been about midnight when I heard my husband slide out of bed.

"Where are you going, Henry?" I asked. "What's the matter—do you hear anything downstairs?"

"Do I hear anything downstairs?" asked my angry husband. "Do I *hear* anything? Listen to that!"

I listened. Well could I hear the wail of Piker, which hadn't stopped once during this awful evening.

"Where am I going?" pursued Henry. "I'm going downstairs to let that wretched pup out and ask him which spot in the house he wants to sleep in."

Henry hadn't been gone long when from the kitchen I heard awful screams and the sound of things dropping. I threw on some clothes and

went down. I found Henry seated in a chair holding his head in his hands, while laments came from the buttery in Seraphy's voice.

"Are ye hurt—are ye hurt much? I niver meant t' do it! How could I know it wuz ye?"

On the floor, by the wan light of a guttering candle, there was a broken plate. What was left of some slices of bacon Piker was consuming with speed.

"Oh, Henry, what's the matter? What's Seraphy doing in the buttery at this hour?" I cried. Seraphy was groaning and lamenting.

"'Twas the dog! I come down to stop him, an' there was somethin' movin' there, an', ma'am, before I knew what to do, I up an' heaved the plate o' sliced bacon for to-morrow's breakfast at it! Oh, to think of me hittin' Mr. Preston on th' head with a plate of bacon! An' then it come over me that I wuz in me nightgown, ma'am, so I shut mesilf up here. Niver in my life—niver in all my life——"

But I hastened to the sink, put some cold water on a dish towel and wrapped it round my poor husband's head, which luckily was only bruised. I suppose if Seraphy had felled him to the ground, her modesty would have made her retire to the buttery and shut the door.

Henry went back to bed, his head aching badly.

No one thought of Piker. I learned next day that he had spent a peaceful night on the foot of Maria's bed.

That was the way with Piker. He showed us the kind of stuff he was made of that night. Throughout his long life he always got people into trouble and then profited himself by the mis-haps he had caused. Some dogs, as well as people, are made that way, and had I had any sense, I should have sent him away the next morning, before we had had time to get attached to him. Piker coolly eating that ill-gotten bacon with my husband's head nearly cracked open and Seraphy as near hysterics as she can get, ought to have taught me a lesson.

The next day he ate a number of our shoes, which Jimmie said was only a "puppy trick." Puppy trick or no, Piker never got over it. He always chews up everything leather he can get, eating his own collar and the leather case that holds his license tag at least three times a year. Henry says the last words have been uttered about a dog when one says that he eats his own license. Piker seldom stays at home, though you could not say he runs away—he visits. He has a vast acquaintance which extends all over town: one cannot walk anywhere with Piker without women shoo-ing him out of their yards with:

“Piker, you bad dog, get out of this!” while vulgar little boys keep up a perpetual cry of “Here, Pike, Pike!”

He is a daily object lesson in the method by which a good-for-nothing wastrel fastens himself on decent people to his gain and their loss.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Seraphy came to me asking "Ma'am, have ye seen Piker?" it was only natural, knowing Piker's character as I did, that I should ask, "What's that dog been up to now?"

"He ain't been doing nothin'," responded Seraphy. "What I want Piker for is to watch the wash."

"*Watch the wash?*" I asked.

"Yis, ma'am," replied Seraphy. "Things is gettin' fierce, what with sneak thieves and everythin'. Not a wash day goes by, ma'am, but every one in this neighbourhood loses somethin'. 'There's somebody around here's gettin' fitted out to get married,' I says to Clifford's girl. 'Well,' she says, 'tain't me or you,' just as pert as you please! An' I can't set over them clothes all mornin'. I got to turn my back some time," Seraphy went on aggrievedly, "an' that's what I want Piker for."

"You'd know, wouldn't you," said Maria, "that the one time in twenty that we need Piker he can't be found. This thieving is most mysterious. Three towels went this morning from the Halls' line. Nora said she only turned her back

for a minute and when she came back again three of them were gone—just like teeth being knocked out, she said it looked like. It'll be our turn next, you'll see, Editha."

Just here Piker hove into view. From the impudent tilt of his head and the rate of speed at which he was getting over the ground, I judged he had been up to some mischief and was running away from something. As the gate was shut he scaled the fence like a cat. Then, seeing me, he hurled himself at me as if shot from a catapult. This was Piker's way of greeting any of the family, Maria or Seraphy included. If we push him away, saying, "Get out, Piker!" he assumes a wounded expression which makes one feel like a beast. The sight of Piker diverted Maria from the clothesline robberies.

"That creature is really too hideous," she said.

Jimmie was sitting on the piazza reading. "Poor old Piker!" he called in a commiserating tone. "'Tisn't people's fault in this world, Aunt Maria, if they're far from beautiful."

"I wouldn't mind what he does at home," continued Maria. "What mortifies me is the constant hot water he keeps us in with the neighbours. Why, there's positively a track worn from the feet of people coming to complain about Piker."

At that moment Edith turned into the yard and Piker arose and barked at her.

"And that's a horrid trick," complained Maria, "having a dog, a great dog, bound out at one. Sometimes, Editha, I feel as if I were going to be torn limb from limb." Jimmie giggled. Maria weighs close on two hundred and Piker isn't a large dog. Edith, I could see, had news to tell. She brushed Piker aside impatiently.

"More clothes," she announced, "have gone from the Bakers' line!"

"You don't say so!" said Maria with interest. "What went this time?"

"A stocking of Eddie's and an apron—and some clothes of Mrs. Baker's, and more than that," my daughter went on, with the relish of one telling bad news, "things have gone from the Tylers' line, too."

"It's the strangest thing," exclaimed Maria. "I don't understand it. We've not had any stolen, luckily."

"No," said Jimmie, looking up from his book, "no one'd dare to steal things where Piker was. Good old Pike! You know, you said yourself, Aunt Maria, you felt safer with Piker in the house."

"Well," replied Maria ungraciously, "it would

be a pity if that ugly animal wasn't good for something."

Mrs. Baker, my next-door neighbour, seeing us sitting on the piazza, joined us.

"Have you had anything stolen?" she enquired. "Eddy's — er — nether undergarments have vanished." She paused a moment. "A pair of similar garments of mine have gone, too," she announced sternly.

"It's really shameful," Maria exclaimed. "It's gone too far altogether. We can't feel safe in our beds nights with things going off the clothes-line every minute. We ought to organise, Editha: I think the ladies of this neighbourhood should join and talk up ways of protecting their homes."

"Yes," said Mrs. Baker, "we've no reason to believe that the depredations will confine themselves to *laungerie*."

"I'll telephone to the various people," Maria volunteered, "to come here for a cup of tea this afternoon and we'll see what can be done."

Maria's programme was followed out. By four o'clock half a dozen of my neighbours were assembled on our piazza. Maria said never a word. She sat still in her chair, nor did she rise from it when any of the ladies came or when they went. She had no theory to offer concerning the inexplicable nature of the thefts.

"It looks," Mrs. Baker said, "as if some one had done it from wanton mischief!"

"Or as if it were a crazy person, or a child," said some one else.

Here it seemed to me Maria looked uneasy. When they'd gone:

"Aren't you feeling well, Maria?" I asked.

"No," said Maria, "I'm not. I'm not feeling well at all, Editha! I thought they'd never go! It's been an awful, awful time for me! I've never passed through such an afternoon!"

"Why didn't you excuse yourself and go into the house?"

"I couldn't!" replied my sister sternly.

"What on earth's the matter?" I asked her.

Cautiously Maria put her hand beneath her and held up before me a pair of garments.

"This is what's the matter, Editha," she said. "*These* are Mrs. Baker's!"

"Why, Maria!" I exclaimed, "how did those get here? What are you doing with Mrs. Baker's—— Why have you been sitting on them all afternoon?"

"I've been sitting on them for the honour of the family, that's why—and if you think it's been a pleasant task! Editha, I don't know how I can break it to you, but it's a member of our own family who's guilty of all we've been discussing

this afternoon. It's *Piker*—it's that miserable *Piker* who's been stealing the clothes off the lines! It was the Lord's own mercy that just one second before the ladies began to come, *Piker* bounded on the porch—I was sitting here waiting for them—waving these undergarments of Mrs. Baker's in his jaws like a flag! He gamboled up to me as if he thought it was funny, and I had just time to snatch them from him and sit down upon them—— Oh, Editha!" my sister wailed, "think what would have happened—think what our feelings would have been—if he had dashed in a moment later, after they were all here!"

"Why," I asked my sister, "didn't you tell them, since you knew?"

"Editha!" cried Maria, "I should never lift my head again if they found out; and besides they might kill *Piker*. It would be an awful thing to have a dog of ours killed for a reason like that," my sister explained to me in the voice which she uses when she thinks I am lost to shame. "Can't you see the position it puts us in? This must be hid from every one. *Piker* must be locked up on Mondays, or else we must beat him so that he'll be afraid of the sight of—undergarments. I think that will perhaps be best. They teach dogs to be afraid of some sorts of uniforms;

I think it ought to be easy to teach them to be afraid of—garments.”

At table that evening I told the family of Piker's performances. The boys seemed to think it was funny and even Edith said: “Isn't he clever not to get caught!” For the wretched dog so wormed himself into the affections of every one of us that we condoned those traits of his that we didn't admire. Henry laughed, too, but he added:

“Editha, please get a list of the things that have been stolen, so that we can pay for them.”

“What!” said Maria. “You don't mean, Henry, that you're going to hold your family up to public ridicule and mortification, do you? No body need ever know!”

“How much do you suppose the Bakers' nether undergarments are going to cost?” enquired Osborn.

“When I was a girl,” Maria said, “young men did not refer to such things in the presence of ladies.” Then she burst out again in a wail: “Oh, Henry, think twice before you do a thing like this! The things that have been stolen are really very small! It's just their going so mysteriously. Couldn't we replace them anonymously?” she suggested. Here Edith giggled, but her aunt ignored her mirth.

"I'm sorry, Maria," said Henry, "to mortify you, but when one's dog steals clothes from the neighbours' lines, I don't see anything but to replace them." Then to avoid any further argument, Henry went to his room.

"Couldn't we just send packages at night?" Maria pleaded. "Then it would look as though the thief had become converted. To think that the meeting for looking into the robberies should have happened at our house, and that Piker dog squatting right there, thumping his ugly tail on the piazza floor!"

When we were getting ready for bed, Henry threw at me rather irritably, "Piker's getting to be a first-class nuisance."

I said nothing. The "getting to be" seemed to me a mild way of putting it. Just then Piker bounded in as if expecting congratulation. That was one of the most irritating things about the dog. Shame was unknown to him. Piker had none of the repentant moments for his misdeeds that most dogs have. Instead of crouching, conscience-stricken, as a finely grained dog would when he was reprovved, Piker merely cocked a surprised ear at one and gazed up in a lovable way into one's face. Henry patted his head.

"He's a good watch-dog anyway, poor old Piker!" he said.

This has been our invariable excuse for him. When he digs up the neighbours' plants or steals their food, all we say is, "He's a good watchdog!"

CHAPTER VII

I SUPPOSE we wouldn't have minded what happened next quite so much if it hadn't come right on top of the clothes stealing.

Not long after this I waked up in the middle of the night with the feeling of unusual noises in the house. For a long minute I listened; I felt sure that Henry was listening, too, each of us sharing the other's moment of apprehension. Finally Henry broke the ghastly silence with:

"I suppose you think you hear burglars again?"

"I don't know what I hear," I said. "I think I hear something."

From downstairs in the dining room there came a sound and Henry bounded into the hall.

"Come back, Henry!" I cried. "Don't expose yourself!" And I ran out into the hall with him.

"Go back to your room, Editha!" he commanded.

"Oh, Henry, let's both go back and lock the door!" I pleaded with him.

Just then a light twinkled from the dining room into the hall and Henry growled in a voice that I wouldn't have believed possible to him, a

voice to strike terror to the heart of any burglar:

“What do you want?”

In a panic of fear, I leaned over the banisters, and just then Maria cried out, “Oh, what is it, what is it?” And Edith came out from her room, saying, “Is it burglars?” I thought her tone seemed rather pleased than otherwise.

Henry bent over the banisters, fiercely repeating, “What do you want?”

Instead of burglars there appeared my two sons. Jimmie held a light in his hand, and Osborn a revolver: at which Henry roared in a tone no less terrible than he had employed to the burglar:

“What are you two young idiots doing prowling around the house with fire-arms at this time of night? Where did you get that revolver, anyway?”

“It *was* a burglar,” Osborn explained, “a sneak thief. Jimmie and I heard him and we crept down and he galloped out of the window. I guess they won’t try any sneak-thieving in our house again!” he added proudly.

Here Maria gave an awful groan.

“Oh, help me,” she whispered, “help me to get to my room! My knees are weakening under me!”

It took both Henry and Osborn to support her

to a chair in the hall, and as she gasped for breath she brought out these words:

"Where is Piker?"

Where, indeed, was Piker, our precious watch-dog, the dog about whom no good could be spoken except that he made us love him in spite of his actions, and whom we had always excused for all his evil doings on the ground that he would protect us from the potential burglar! Where was he?

Piker, the watch-dog, was sleeping peacefully, curled up on top of my clothes, which were folded on a chair. When he saw the light and heard my voice he woke up, shook himself, ran out and feeling that something was expected of him he ran downstairs, barking arrogantly.

This was too much, even for Jimmie. In disgusted silence we separated and went back to our broken sleep.

The next day Piker ate his license again, ambled away—no doubt in quest of what Mrs. Baker calls her "laungerie"—and was taken to the dog pound. Jimmie was still angry with Piker.

"Let him stay there overnight," he said, "the old skate! Do him good!" For Jimmie's pride was severely hurt. He didn't mind Piker digging up everything, he didn't mind his stealing our food and that of other people; he didn't mind

his robbing the clothes lines; but he minded very much indeed his sleeping through the burglar, and he suffered all the feelings of shame which should have been Piker's, had the creature not been lost to decency.

When Henry learned of Piker's whereabouts, "Let him stay there!" said he.

His words fell upon the family like a bomb.

"You don't mean that, father," pleaded Jimmie. "Say you don't mean that!"

"I do mean it," Henry answered firmly and I realised that he had suffered in his pride concerning the dog just as Jimmie had.

"Oh, see here, father," Osborn began.

My husband interferes very little with the management of his household, but when he puts his foot down, it stays there. He cut Osborn short with:

"I don't want to hear any argument at all from any of you children. We've had enough of Piker, enough and to spare! He's good for nothing. Your Aunt Maria complains about him morning, noon and night. Seraphy threatens to leave on his account about once a week; the neighbours have repeatedly told us they'll shoot him if he doesn't keep off their places. I feel I'm saving him from a worse fate. And besides that, think how he acted about the burglar!" Henry finished

savagely. He laid down his knife and fork and stalked from the table, leaving his supper half finished.

We sat in awed silence for a moment, which was broken by my sister.

"Oh, Editha," she cried, "surely, surely, Henry can't mean that, coming on top of everything, too! Why, Editha, think how poor-folksy it looks to have your dog killed like a common cur in the pound!"

"I thought you'd be glad, Aunt Maria," said Jimmie.

"Glad!" echoed his aunt, "glad to have poor old Piker killed!" Maria left the table. Osborn got up, too.

"Where are you going, Osborn?" asked Maria. "Aren't you going to finish your supper?"

"He's going to see his girl," snickered Edith. "He's going to forget his sorrows."

"You shut up," said Jimmie fiercely. Osborn is Jimmie's idol. Osborn's training and example have intensified all Jimmie's primæval contempt for women.

Osborn paid no attention to his sister, but made off with a cheerful alacrity that accorded but ill with the tragic moment, leaving Jimmie and Edith together to plot how their father could be circumvented.

The next morning at breakfast Seraphy stalked into the dining room. She placed her two hands on her hips.

"Is it throe, Mr. Preston," she asked, "that ye're goin' to leave Piker in th' pound?"

"Yes," said Henry shortly. I had seen him look around the room the way he does for Piker in the morning, and there had been no Piker. Indeed, there was a terrible desolation in the house. No pattering of feet, no thumping of clumsy tail on the floor, no irritating barks, no bounding up and down of welcome. It suddenly rushed over me that a house was a sad place without a Piker dog.

"Do you mean ye're really goin' t' leave him?" Seraphy persisted. "Well, all I can say is that a man with childer of his own should have more heart! I wouldn't have thought it of you, Mr. Preston, that I wouldn't!" She stalked back to the kitchen.

Henry turned eyes of amazement on me. Maria completed Seraphy's work by saying:

"You see, Henry, even Seraphy misses poor old Piker. You might give in. How can a man make his family suffer so!" she added bitterly.

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed my poor husband. "Why, you and Seraphy have done nothing but quarrel about Piker ever since he came to

our house two years ago, and now you treat me like a butcher!"

At dinner time Mrs. Baker waylaid Henry as he was going home.

"Mr. Preston," she asked, "is it true that your dog is to be killed in the pound?"

"Yes," Henry replied bitterly.

"Oh, Mr. Preston," Mrs. Baker entreated, "oh, don't do that! Why, it's like having a friend executed, to have Piker killed."

"I thought he dug up your plants. You complained about him often enough, Mrs. Baker."

"I may have complained," Mrs. Baker replied. "What else is one to do when one's best geraniums have been dug up! I've complained of Piker as I would of a child. All I ever said was that if he wants to dig geraniums, let him begin at home: but I always have admitted, Mr. Preston, that dogs will be dogs. Oh, be kind-hearted! Don't let this go on!" she begged.

During dinner no less than three of the neighbours came to ask us about the fate of Piker, including Mr. Powers, who had threatened to shoot the dog. Henry's leaving the table to interview his fellow-townsmen was the only relief to a gloomy meal. Blackness unbroken had settled over us. Maria sniffed audibly. Jimmie and

Edith sat with their eyes fixed on their plates. Finally Maria said:

“It’s exactly as if a member of the family had died!”

Henry replied nothing, but continued to eat, a picture of abject woe. At last he said, “People complain that the neighbourhood is so quiet without Piker——”

At that moment there was a bark, a rush of feet and Piker, alive and well, catapulted himself first on one and then the other of us, leaping around the table with excited barks, while each of us caught him to his bosom. Henry held him to his shoulder a long time, like a baby, as if he were begging his pardon for making him wait so long. In the hall we heard the voice of a friend of Henry’s, saying:

“I had to go to the pound to get my own dog and there I saw Piker. I thought I’d save you trouble by bringing him home.”

Henry went out and shook his hand with more gratitude than I have often seen him display.

“Thank you!” he said. “Thank you so much! I was just going to send down for him!”

At which Maria shot a triumphant glance at me, which I did not return. I hadn’t suffered so much about Piker as had my husband. Well, I knew he couldn’t stick it out, and even if he had,

I knew of exactly six other people in the house who, on their own responsibility, would have rescued our dog Piker before anything happened to his worthless loveable hide.

Besides that I had other things to worry me. Ever since the night that Edith had flung at Osborn, "He's going to see his girl," I had been worried. Osborn has paid very little attention to girls. He had plenty of friends, of course, and when he had gone to call on a Miss Fairweather who is visiting the Powers down the street, I had paid no attention. It was Jimmie's attitude and the worried way in which he watched his brother which showed me that perhaps Osborn was taking a girl seriously for the first time.

"How," Jimmie seemed mutely asking his brother, "can a great chief like you, captain of your high school, great at track athletics, how can you be stooping to spend your valuable time with a girl?"

CHAPTER VIII

THERE are many tragedies which all mothers must face, and they are most of them based on the great tragedy that we lose our children daily. Your boy of to-day isn't the one who kissed you good-night last night, although in your blindness you think he's the same.

And each mother according to her nature has her own moment when the loss is especially poignant. Some will tell you the day when your baby isn't your baby any more is the worst of all. That is bad to face, but, after all, you're glad that he is strong and large of his age. It may be there's something like a lump in your throat the first time you see him strutting around in absurd little breeches, but there's pride in your heart. I've heard of mothers who've wept when curls had to be sacrificed; what, indeed, haven't we mothers wept over and agonised over? But to me none of these things is so sad as when one's son first falls in love. You and he are the only two people in the world who don't laugh at it, and the heart-breaking of it is that he'll join the rest in the laugh soon enough, and leave you alone to your tragedy; for you don't give your boy away when

he marries. It's the first girl he cares for seriously who steals him from you. It's "good-by, son," in earnest then. There are things then he can't tell you, and you know that all the time there will be more silence between you. You know he has told *her* things that you would give all you own to hear, that before her the secret places of his heart have opened.

Haven't you watched your children from far off talking and talking? It's a stream that never stops. Don't you wish you could know what they say? Why are they suddenly quiet when you come? Where have you failed that they've so little to tell you? What divides you? Do they hear you knocking to be let in, do you suppose? Perhaps on their side of the wall of silence they are knocking, too, and dull ears can't hear. It has always been so from the time they were very little. No mother can quite remember when the silence between her and her children grew up. When were your eyes blind, you wonder. When did you fail to understand? And you know, unless your eyes are sealed, that the girl your boy loves knows about your boy things you never can know. All he thinks and hopes and fears he gives her, and she doesn't care. He tells her the things you most anxiously watch to find out, bits of precious knowledge that you learn, as it were, by

stealth. She has the key to the secret that you so painfully piece together, only it doesn't interest her—and why, indeed, should it? He isn't *her* boy.

I knew, of course, that one's boys must fall in love—many times most likely—and marry some time, but I needed definite proof before I would believe in the inevitable. The proof came in this way.

I saw Jimmie sneaking away in a guilty fashion: he carried—I was going to say in his hands, but it would be more accurate to say in his arms—some flowers. These flowers were arranged with the precision that raised them from a mere bunch of roses to a "floral tribute." One would have thought that the young lady for whom they were destined was a monument or the cemetery on Decoration Day.

My eyes had lighted on Jimmie furtively making off the back way to save Osborn's reputation, just as I had asked our new minister—one of the new school of divines, a muscular young Christian—out on the piazza. Jimmie sneaking off with that bouquet was proof positive that it had happened, and suddenly I found my preparations to be sensible in this emergency were as nothing. While my eyes were following the manoeuvres of Jimmie and my heart was full of fears for Os-

born, my tongue was obediently making talk.

Perhaps I am unjust, but it seems to me a minister should have intuitions: he should not have made me go through the kind of conversation that I was at that moment enduring.

“Yes,” I was saying, as naturally as if I were not deep in the affairs of my sons, “Osborn goes to college next fall. . . . Yes, it is true—I suppose he does stand a chance of making the varsity his first year. . . . Oh, very gratifying! . . . Yes, yes, indeed, the strongest men do make the best Christians. . . . I am glad to hear you say so. A mother likes to feel her boy has an influence for good. . . . Yes, I agree with you quite. They ought to play when they play and work when they work, but do they *ever* work? . . . Well, I am glad that you feel that way. . . . Of course, we ought all to co-operate with our children’s sports. . . . Oh, so much more enlightened! I’ll tell him what you say. He’ll appreciate it. . . . Yes, I suppose the captain of a high-school nine is important in his little world. I’ll tell him about your Bible readings. I’m sure he’ll be interested.”

Osborn is by way of being a local celebrity. I am given to understand that he can “knock the stuffin’s out of any other kid of any high-school team.”

Of course, as our new minister says, this is all very gratifying to a parent. He is sure to make his mark in college, the principal of the high school assures me. I am glad it is in baseball instead of football.

While I exchanged platitudes with the minister, I watched Jimmie from my seat by the window. I heard the whoops of "the fresh Tyler kid," and I saw Jimmie and his haystack of flowers dodge into the corn. I realised that as long as he might he intended to keep scandal from our door; I knew what discipline it meant that he went at all. I knew that he had "no use for flowers, anyway," and I could imagine how he hated to face the Powerses' grinning maid. My sympathy was with him when I saw him slide through a hole in the fence and jerk the tribute savagely after him. Jimmie had been reared in Osborn's simple and adequate philosophy, some of which has penetrated even to me:

"Never let a kid of your own size lick you.

"A fellow can't play ball if he's got a swelled head, any more than if he'd got the mumps.

"I haven't much use for girls—they take too much time."

And now the teacher of this philosophy was making himself beautiful with the purpose of calling on a girl.

I heard Osborn tramping up and down his room. And as soon as the minister left, I walked past the door and saw him fussing with a necktie before the glass. I have always protested against untidy clothes, and now my words were blossoming into deeds—and I am sure you will understand when I say I felt a twinge, for it's hard to have your boy do for a foolish girl he scarcely knows, things that his mother has had to work to get him to do.

Soon he came downstairs and began picking out "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" with one finger. He went out and looked down the street; he came back and began on "My Bonnie" again.

When Jimmie came at last, Osborn was standing on the steps, waiting.

"Where you been?" he said shortly. "Where's your answer?"

"Where d'you s'pose I been—fishin'?" asked Jimmie, with bitter sarcasm.

"Where's your answer?" Osborn repeated, and I caught in his tone the warning that it wasn't good for younger brothers to fool with him.

"She says she'll go," growled Jimmie.

"D'you see her yourself?"

"Yes," answered Jimmie. "She was in the hammock." I felt glad that Jimmie had been spared the maid.

"What'd she do with the flowers?"

"I dunno."

"Don't you get gay," warned his brother.

"How sh'd I know what she did with the old flowers? I s'pose she stuck 'em in her clothes."

I pictured Miss Fairweather with the floral tribute "stuck" in her clothes.

"Did she like 'em?"

"Sure she liked 'em," Jimmie asserted. "She said: 'For me! How lovely!'" He mimicked Miss Fairweather in a high falsetto. Then a heart's cry burst from him.

"She ain't much! She's a thin old maid!"

"Aw, you keep still!" said my eldest son genially.

And I saw him swing down the road, his shoulders squared, as well set up and as good looking a lad as you'd find in a day's walk. I don't say so just because I'm his mother. I know it's so. When I'm in the street or in the cars, I watch the other boys and it's seldom I see as manly, fine looking a boy.

My mind went back to a little boy called Osborn I should never see any more. A big, broad-shouldered fellow who can look over my head has come to take his place. I am often lonely for the little lad I could keep so safe by my side. Mothers have these foolish thoughts often.

Jimmie came through the house. His hands were plunged so deep in his pockets that he almost split his coat in the back, and he kicked the heel of one shoe with the toe of the other. Maria called to him: "Mercy me, Jimmie, can't you walk without kicking your shoes to bits? Take your hands out of your pockets. One would think you spoil your clothes for fun!"

Jimmie looked at me with an uneasy eye. I know he suspected that I was "next." To put his mind at rest and to divert my sister Maria's attention—"I suppose Osborn's out at practice," I remarked cheerfully.

"Osborn's gone——" began Edith, who had met her brother on his way to the Powerses'.

"My dear," I interrupted, "please get me my blue silk. It's in my room;" and, with a grateful glance at me, Jimmie escaped, knocking the heel of one shoe on the toe of the other.

"That boy's getting sulky," said my sister Maria. I knew that he was not sulky, only more worried than he had ever been in his life. Osborn had been his hero without reproach. Jimmie had always considered it an honour to be Osborn's brother. There is but one Osborn in his simple creed and Jimmie is his prophet. The little boys look up to him because he is so near the throne, and now this hero had "gone back" on all his phi-

losophy, recanted openly without shame, without an excuse, and was going to take a "girl" out in broad daylight to go to walk.

Jimmie had learned that heroes are human and that men are not to be counted on.

I longed to go and comfort Jimmie, and perhaps in turn be comforted, too, for though I knew it was foolish, I was sad enough myself. But Jimmie is of the age whose jealous manliness one must be careful not to offend. I never make the mistake of kissing him when there are people around, as his aunt does. I never call him dear—only sometimes when I steal into his room when he has gone to bed at night. He doesn't mind then. Dear me, how hard it is to have one's babies grow up and how one worries about it all!

CHAPTER IX

I CALLED at the Powerses' at a time I knew Miss Fairweather would be at home. I found her a thin, pale little thing of about twenty-one, with the kind of face that people who admire that type call "piquant." I wondered what it was that Osborn saw in her, for she wasn't at all the sort of girl that I would have thought he would admire. She was ladylike but rather overdressed, I thought. I wondered, too, what a young lady of that age wanted with my honest, good-looking boy, and I felt indignant when I reflected that she would throw him over for the first older man who came along.

For all I watched Osborn so carefully, I couldn't see that his character was in the least affected. It was Jimmie who grew morose and sullen and distraught. He went through all the emotions I should not have been surprised to see in Osborn. It was Jimmie, too, who snubbed his sister when she joked Osborn about Miss Fairweather.

Jimmie would have been glad to have him carry on his friendship with Miss Fairweather by stealth, if he needs must see her at all, but Osborn

gloried in his shame, and he threw himself into his first love-affair with the same enthusiasm that has made him so good a ball-player. It absorbed him to such an extent that he had no time for ball. I don't suppose I should have noticed that he was neglecting his nine, or cared what he did, if it hadn't been for Jimmie. For I couldn't help seeing the whole affair from his point of view. He saw what was happening with amazement, then with growing horror, and then, when it became an established fact that Osborn wasn't playing ball as he ought to, that he went to Miss Fairweather's instead of to practice, in his own mind he sat in judgment of his brother and found him guilty.

There are times when I feel I am all my family rolled into one, so clearly do I see any given event from their several points of view, and I find myself instinctively taking the side of the one who feels most keenly about it.

For three weeks Jimmie lived in silent misery, and Osborn in his fool's paradise, ignoring conscience, who, in the shape of Jimmie, attended his steps, suggesting, "Ain't you goin' to practise to-day?" and whom Osborn would silence with a good-natured, "Aw, mind your own business, kid!"

It was at the strawberry festival of our church

that the climax came. Osborn had gone for Miss Fairweather, who was going with him as his guest. How magnificently he intended to do things, I guessed, as he negotiated a loan from me, to be repaid from his next month's allowance. Our own home roses were not good enough to send to this fastidious young lady, I had noticed. Osborn now went to the florist's and sent the long-stemmed kind that don't grow in simple gardens.

For a wonder, Jimmie accompanied me. He had been unusually gloomy all day and I felt some sort of a crisis was approaching, and that it had to do with the ball-game next day. It was dark as we walked down the street together and just in front of us was a knot of little boys.

"Betcher we don't beat to-morow," said one, whose voice I recognised as that of the fresh Tyler kid. "Betcher they hit Os all over the field."

"Betcher we knock the stuffin's out o' 'em, anyway," said another.

"What's the matter with Os Preston? He ain't playin' ball any more."

"Aw, he's got a girl!" the fresh Tyler kid announced, as if that explained any human weakness.

"Sure, he's awful soft on that Fairweather girl!" agreed another boy, in the tone of one who says, "The whole town knows that!"

And that was why Jimmie slunk into the strawberry festival behind me and instead of joining the other boys in their onslaught on the strawberries and ice-cream, ate his at the table with some of us grown-ups, disappearing afterward into the outlying shadows. I learned later that he had the melancholy pleasure of licking the fresh Tyler kid, but that was small balm to one who has heard the fair name of his hero smirched, and who realises that it is his hero's fault. Hearing, as I did, with Jimmie's ears, the festival seemed full to me of people talking of Osborn, and he and Miss Fairweather seemed the most conspicuous people there. Miss Fairweather wore a very elaborate pink organdy and a great picture hat that made her seem even smaller than she was, and Osborn looked down on her with an air of fatuous affection. A half-grown-up boy in love isn't a heroic sight, even in his mother's eyes, but there's an element of the tragic about him to her when he is only ridiculous to the rest of the world. So when the others saw a good-looking lad mooning over a pretty girl, I saw many other things.

For me the only important people there that night were Miss Fairweather and Osborn, though I daresay some one else might have told you that they had seen all our town eating strawberries. It was hard for me to talk politely to those about

me, so much I wished I might hear what Osborn was saying to the girl beside him: so much I longed to know where in the shadows Jimmie was lurking. It is very much to our credit that we mothers do so few dishonourable things that we don't, in our great anxiety, all become listeners at keyholes and surreptitious readers of letters. Some of us do, I believe, and our children find us out and never forgive us.

Well, I couldn't, of course, hear what they were saying, but I thought at least I might do something for Jimmie. I couldn't bear the thought of him glooming alone in the dark, so I went to look for him to set him at work helping about something. I found him and Dave Rogers behind the lilacs. Jimmie was saying in a savage tone, "I'll learn him to talk fresh!"

At sight of me he jumped to his feet, and Dave drifted softly away, as other boys do when somebody's mother puts in an appearance. Just then I heard Osborn's voice at the other side of the lilacs. So, after all, I had my desire.

"You know you're coming to-morrow to see me pitch," he was saying.

"No, I can't," Miss Fairweather answered, and I thought there was a little embarrassed note in her voice.

"Why, you promised!" cried Osborn, and I

couldn't bear the hurt note he said it in. I tell you, I longed to give that Miss Fairweather a piece of my mind.

"Well," she explained, "I thought I could when I said I would, but I can't—that's all."

"Nonsense! Of course you can. You've got to," Osborn informed her, in his head-of-the-clan voice.

"There's a friend of mine coming down tomorrow——" Miss Fairweather was more and more embarrassed.

"Oh, if that's all, bring her along," Osborn genially commanded.

"It isn't a girl," said Miss Fairweather and her tone was the friendliest possible, as if she were talking to another girl. "It's a man. I didn't mean to tell before, but we've gotten to be such good friends in the little while we've known each other that I don't mind telling you. It's my fiancé, Doctor Price, who's coming."

And when I tell you that she told him this in the tone of one doing you a favour, I needn't tell you more about *her*.

"Who?" Osborn asked sternly.

"The man I'm engaged to," she replied. "So, you see, I've got to be with him. We must go now, or Mrs. Powers'll wonder where I am."

All she was thinking of was to avoid a scene

that she was afraid Osborn might make. I heard Jimmie breathe in a horrified whisper, "Ain't that rotten?" I saw he was face to face with something he couldn't understand. I looked at him sadly.

"I've been expecting something like this," I told him.

"Gee!" he exclaimed.

I saw at that moment that I had some of the prestige in his mind that I used to have when mothers meant infallibility.

I suppose the conversation we overheard put Osborn and Miss Fairweather in an entirely new light. It had probably never occurred to Jimmie that Miss Fairweather was anything but humbly grateful for Osborn's attentions. From Jimmie's point of view it was condescension without measure for his brother to have anything to say to her at all, and it now dawned on his bewildered brain that Miss Fairweather had not felt flattered, and had "shaken" Osborn in the most cold-blooded way.

"She holds her racket's if she was shooing off June bugs!" Jimmie now muttered, as if that gave a last intolerable touch to the business.

He had always known that girls were no use. He had learned that heroes are but men and men

are not to be depended on. Now he discovered that girls are false as well as useless.

I am destined always to listen to some meaningless chatter when my heart is fullest of my boys. Writing of it now, I give Jimmie the largest place because I believe the whole affair left more trace on him. At the time my heart was wrung for Osborn and for a few moments I hated Miss Fairweather more than I hope ever again to hate any one. She had hurt my boy just to feed her vanity and to pass the time while she was waiting for the man she was engaged to. For the worst of it (or perhaps the best—who knows?) was that Osborn really cared—there was a radiance about him that showed how wonderful it all was to him. And while she filled his days, and, I suppose, his thoughts, I don't imagine he even, in his innocence, told himself he was "in love." Boys are blessedly ignorant about the working of their own hearts, and a natural boy often has to be told he's in love before he knows what has happened to him.

So I sat thinking of these things, while Maria rambled on about the gallons of ice-cream and the bushels of strawberries that were sold. The little noises of the house said nothing to her, though they told me that Osborn had come home and

that Jimmie was roaming about the house and that Edith had not got home. I was glad of that.

If one might be alone when one wanted to think and might meet grief always where there were no curious eyes to look at one life would be easier.

But as my sister rocked back, her incurious eyes rested on my face, which I tried to keep from looking anxious, while my attention was strained to the breaking point. At last Jimmie came downstairs and wandered aimlessly into the room. He pretended to look for a book; he upset a pile of papers, his furtive eyes avoiding mine. I pretended not to notice. I knew he had something he wanted to say to me, but if I spoke to him he'd not have the courage. How hard it is to keep still and not help! My sister broke the silence with a "Mercy me!" (She had settled down to her evening solitaire.) "What ails the boy? One would think he had St. Vitus dance!" which sent him into the hall, and I saw his round tanned face was as nearly pale as I had ever seen it. He signed to me to come, but in what was the bare whisper of a gesture.

I arose at once and went out in my most deliberate way, as if I were going to get something and **knew** exactly where it was.

I followed Jimmie to the piazza, for we both

instinctively went where no one could hear us. Then Jimmie muttered:

“Osborn’s feeling bum. He’s sort o’ knocked out.” He was loyal to the last, you see, though what he had to tell me next almost choked him. He could hardly get the words out.

“He says he won’t play ball to-morrow!”

It may very well be that you don’t understand what it means for the captain of a ball-nine to be a “quitter.” It’s the loss of honour in the eyes of his fellows, no less. It’s like a general saying that, for all he cares, the battle may go on without him. It’s the kind of thing that a boy doesn’t do, and Jimmie, while he loyally excused his brother to me with the story that Osborn was feeling “bum,” condemned him. I knew, too, that he had turned to me as a last resort to save Osborn.

I put my hand on his little hot head and pushed back his mop of hair. There was no one around, so I allowed myself the liberty.

“Don’t you worry,” I said. “I think he’ll play all right.”

Then I went upstairs to my son Osborn.

We have all had in our lives our moments of quivering humiliation, our cowardly moments, when we are abject in the abasement of pain. There is no one, I imagine, who can say that there

has never been a moment in his whole life when pain was the stronger. So I cannot blame Osborn for going to pieces at first.

He had no poses to help him, for a pose of heroism helps one in the hour of need, and poor Osborn had no more pose than a maple-tree.

Perhaps you think that I've done too much fine writing about a boy of seventeen, whose calf-love has come to an abrupt end—wait until your son has been made to suffer through the vanity of a girl.

I found him sitting by his window holding his head in his hands, and he looked up at me with I know not what dumb hurt look in his eyes. When you see your boy suffering, you forget for the moment that he is only seventeen, and that it will soon pass, and that you can be comforted, for he will never suffer in just that blind way ever again.

“Osborn,” I said, “we have all in our family had the courage of pride,” and at my word I think he sat straighter in his chair.

We sat together a long time. What I said to him I can't tell you: for in the moments we feel very deeply we say little that sounds significant. I may have told him broken bits of things that I had lived through and gotten over and all but forgotten. Perhaps that is why we go through

things in our youth that seem so needless when we are older that we may better help our children when their turn comes.

So Osborn's moment passed and he played "great ball" the next day, so I'm told.

Since then Jimmie has looked on me with more respect than he has had for me since he discovered how inferior are women to his own glorious sex. It was Jimmie, after all, who most definitely added to his sum of knowledge. Osborn took his disappointment simply, as he takes everything, and went to playing ball harder than ever. But I suspect Jimmie of knowing that the world is vanity. He has now his sarcastic moments. He has learned, too, many things in too short a time. I think he has been a little disappointed that Osborn has not been more blighted. He had a tendency at first to treat his brother as if he were something fragile, as if he had recovered from a great illness. If one's hero must fall, let his fall shake the hills, let him be wounded and broken, for only a great emotion could excuse in his mind his hero's weakness.

But it isn't in Osborn to play the part of blighted being or anything he doesn't feel. A few weeks after the tragedy, Osborn demanded:

"Say, Ede, why don't you have Berenice Doble around here oftener? That girl's a dead-game

sport! She plays an out-o'-sight game of golf!"

Berenice is a great robust girl, who goes shooting with her father—not at all the kind of girl I should think Osborn would fancy.

Slowly Jimmie let his eyes travel along the table until they rested on mine, and there came into them an indescribable look of contempt.

He had learned before that heroes are human and women faithless. Now he learned that men are fickle.

CHAPTER X

EVERYTHING was going smoothly in the house; one could tell it by the sum of a hundred indefinable noises. As soon as a house gets out of order, it hums like an angry beehive; no experienced house-mother needs to go downstairs to know if the children are all right, or if the work is progressing as it ought. She knows by the general harmony of sound whether things are right or wrong.

More than this, I could hear Jimmie whooping joyfully at one of the near neighbours. I am used to having Osborn away, and I am used to having Edith away. But I am not yet accustomed to have Jimmie vanish, boy-fashion, off the earth's surface and not know where he is, even if he does stir things up when he's home.

Maria joined me on the piazza with her sewing in one hand, a hand-bill in the other.

"Do you see there's going to be an auction downtown," she said. "I should think one could pick up some Christmas presents there"—for Maria was already at work on her Christmas presents; punctually on December 26 she begins her next year's presents.

I replied yes I thought so, and Maria wandered on about how long it had been since she had gone to an auction.

So all was peace about us, until, suddenly, there arose from the neighbour's yard shrieks and sounds of angry dispute. Maria rocked ponderously back and forth and drew the threads of her embroidery in and out.

"Jimmie's fighting again," she observed. "He's getting to be a very quarrelsome boy, Editha, and domineering. I suppose he gets it by copying Osborn."

The sounds of battle and weeping grew louder and louder. Then there was mingled with it a shrill adult voice.

"That's Mrs. Baker," said Maria, interpreting the sounds. "Well, if I were in her place, I wouldn't let Jimmie bully my children, either."

The Baker children are large and well developed and amply able to take care of themselves, as I told Maria.

"Besides this," said I, "there is no more reason to suppose that Jimmie has been bullying them than that they have been bullying Jimmie."

A faint smile outlined itself upon Maria's lips. She said nothing, but the smile said more eloquently than words, "I know Jimmie."

This irritated me still further, though it

shouldn't have, and I was in no equitable frame of mind to meet Mrs. Baker, who screamed at me:

"Mrs. Preston! Mrs. Preston! Would you mind coming down here for a minute?" So it was with no neighbourly feeling that I proceeded toward Mrs. Baker's. It seemed to me that this was one of the days when every one was down on my poor Jimmie.

There's a Japanese proverb which says, "Even the stones in the streets hate a boy of seven." But it seems to me that boys of twelve or thirteen in our country have their activities thwarted and get more unfair criticism than do children of any other age. The very people who so complacently quote, "Boys will be boys," are the ones who can't understand how necessary are some of the boys' activities at which they choose to be annoyed.

I went down to Mrs. Baker's, disgusted with her for not being able to manage a small battle single-handed. The pudgy, fat Baker boy and the elder, fat Baker girl all started to talk to me at once.

"Hush, children!" said Mrs. Baker in a tone of authority. "Let Jimmie tell his mama what he did himself."

"We was in the swing," said Jimmie, with a fine disregard for grammar that excitement gives a boy of his age, "and I butted Ed in the belly."

Mrs. Baker turned a triumphant eye on me.

"He hit him in the abdomen," corrected the Baker girl.

"I have always been very particular," Mrs. Baker announced, "Mrs. Preston, about the language my children use, as you can see for yourself. You heard how Jimmie referred to Edward's abdomen. He has used that same word at least six times in the last five minutes: and that, Mrs. Preston, I cannot stand. I will have my home kept refined and I say no home can be refined where vulgar, common words are in daily use."

To this I found nothing to say but, "Come home with me, Jimmie."

On the way, "Have I got to say 'abdomen'?" he asked. "Say, have I?"

I took refuge in the cowardly woman's evasion. "I don't think that there's the slightest need of your using either of those terms ever," I replied.

Maria, who had heard the last words, said: "Yes, I should think one could find pleasanter topics of conversation, Jimmie."

That afternoon Jimmie and his friends marched up and down in front of our house shouting something in a sing-song tone. Next day when the Baker boy passed on the way to school, Jimmie

opened the window and hooted at him, and it seemed to me that I heard the whoop taken up farther along the street by other boys.

Late that afternoon I received a call from Mrs. Baker. She came armed for battle. Outside I heard the noise of chanting and hooting of the little boys.

"If you will listen to that, Mrs. Preston," said Mrs. Baker tartly, "you will realise what the cause of my errand is."

I listened and I will admit that the key in which the boys were singing was derisive. As I glanced out of the window I could see four little boys, friends of Jimmie's, with their arms around each other's necks, striding along to these inspiring words, chanted rhythmically:

"Mr. and Mrs. Domen and Ab Domen,
Mr. and Mrs. Domen and Ab Domen,
Mr. and Mrs. Domen and Ab Domen,"

they sang. Mrs. Baker flushed angrily. "You hear, Mrs. Preston!" she said.

"Yes," I said evenly, "I hear—but what about it, Mrs. Baker?"

Just at that moment the fat Baker boy passed the house. The little boys all shouted:

"Here comes Ab! Hello, Ab! There's Ab Domen!" And they started up their chant again:

"Mr. and Mrs. Domen and Ab Domen."

"That's what about it, Mrs. Preston," she said. "That's what about it. My family and my boys are being made a mock of in the public streets, and Jimmie is at the bottom of it! Edward is a sensitive boy and this nickname hurts him very much. His father's family are all fleshy, but there is no reason for his being derided on that account, and I have come to ask you to put a stop to this persecution."

Again the boys went by the house chanting their verse.

"Really, Mrs. Baker," said I, "I cannot see what Jimmie has to do with all this. He isn't among those boys now, and children take up a catchword for no reason at all. I'm sure they don't mean it as any reflection on your boy's plumpness."

"I will not have my boy given such a nickname," replied Mrs. Baker. "And I must ask you to make your Jimmie have it stopped. Edward tells me the boys call him nothing but 'Ab'—and it is your Jimmie, Mrs. Preston, who started all this."

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Baker," said I, "that my boy should have been the indirect cause of yours suffering any annoyance, however slight."

"Annoyance—however *slight!*" she repeated, in what I can only call a snort.

"Annoyance, however slight," I reiterated with firmness. "I will forbid Jimmie to use the nickname in connection with your son: that is all I can reasonably do."

"Then I shall stop this nuisance myself!" she cried. "I hoped to find that you would meet me in a better spirit, but I see that I shall have to carry this out alone!"

With this she departed, and as the front door closed behind her I heard again the obnoxious chant, which continued with all the persistence of a Greek chorus:

"Mr. and Mrs. Domen and Ab Domen."

I never in my life had a scene like this with any one. We have always had the pleasantest relations with our near neighbours, and their children and my children have come and gone from house to house, had their little quarrels and straightened them out again, without the shadow of an unpleasantness having ever passed between any of us.

I told Jimmie to stop singing the song as I had promised I would do. He replied with a grin, "Yes, mother," and we dropped the matter.

The next morning there came a note from Mrs. Baker in which she stiffly requested that my children would cease calling her children "Edward and Sylvia Domen." I told them to do this, though in no friendly spirit toward Mrs. Baker, while Maria remarked that she, for her part, thought that the whole affair was a vulgar one and that I would do well to have more control over my household.

That was only the beginning. The first thing that happened was that one of the selectmen called. I heard him apologetically asking Henry to clip our shrubbery which extends over the walk. He liked it himself, he said, but there was folks in this town meaner'n pizen who wanted the law pushed to the uttermost. At this Maria burst out:

"It's that mean Baker woman! I knew she was up to some spiteful thing the morning she came. I was sitting just outside the window, Editha, and I heard every word she said. And though I think you might have been a little more conciliatory in your tone when you saw how spiteful she was, still it's all her doing."

"What's all this?" asked Henry. "Have you been having trouble with your neighbours? Have you been quarrelling with Mrs. Baker, Editha?"

I explained to Henry exactly what had happened.

There is a proverb about women which begins, "*Varium et mutabile.*" But woman's nature is a steadfast quantity compared with a man's sense of humour. Now a man will burst into mirth over something which endangers the peace of his entire household, and again he will be angry over things that really have their elements of humour. Now, I confess that I had laughed over Mr. and Mrs. Domen and Sylvia and Edward Domen; but all that Henry saw in the matter was his clipped and shorn shrubbery.

"Jimmie," he said, with some asperity, "is plainly getting beyond a woman's control. I shall have to take him in hand myself. There is no use in incensing one's next-door neighbour when a little tact will avoid it."

CHAPTER XI

ONE never realises how great are the normal blessings of life until one is deprived of them. I had often read in newspapers about spite fences and hostile neighbours, and all the horrors of war between household and household. It didn't even come home to me as a "state of affairs" that would have to be taken into account until the morning when I received a letter in the third person from Mrs. Baker, requesting "Mrs. Preston to kindly remove her hens, which had strayed into Mrs. Baker's yard," and darkly hinting that something untimely would happen to Mrs. Preston's hens if they were not removed.

Then, and only then, did I realise that war had been declared between me and one of my neighbours: all because Jimmie had said—not *done*, mind you—that he had butted a neighbour's child, using an anatomical phrase that the neighbour had considered incorrect. I was disgusted with Mrs. Baker, but angry with myself for not having been a better judge of character; and, even as things were, the feud might have died out sooner had not the cry of "Mr. and Mrs. Domen" continued.

A long week dragged on. Mrs. Baker found a number of small and vexing things to do.

Then came the climax. I received a visit from Miss Stone, Jimmie's and Edward's Sunday-school teacher. Miss Stone is an earnest, executive woman. She came to the point at once.

"Dear Mrs. Preston," she said affectionately to me—we have been the best of friends for years—"I know you will understand the spirit in which I come."

At this I stiffened myself for something disagreeable. It came and this is what it was:

"Can't you stop Jimmie and his friends from using the nickname they have given to Eddie Baker? Eddie is a sensitive child, and this constant repetition of the nickname has actually sickened him: he is ill in bed now. He wasn't able to come to Sunday-school to-day. The child is actually pining!"

Of course I made enquiries at once, and found that Eddie Baker was, indeed, ill and in bed. I did all I could. I gave Jimmie a serious talking to. To which he only responded, somewhat cryptically:

"Aw, nickname nothin'! That ain't why Edward's sick."

The physician whom the Bakers employ is a young doctor, whose specialty is nervous diseases,

and he talked about a nervous shock which had acted upon the gastric nerve. Gradually it got to be known about town that Edward Baker was sick abed because of inconsiderate ridicule which had been started by Jimmie. It was a very uncomfortable affair all round: I could feel that every one thought Jimmie a callous and cruel boy.

It was about this time that Jimmie began to have unaccounted-for absences. If I asked him where he was going, he would reply laconically, "Out." If I pinned him down, he would find some transparent evasion. His point of departure always seemed to be from behind our barn. So, though I hate very much to spy on my children's action, I stalked Jimmie to the barn to see what it was, as Maria said, "he was up to."

First there came a series of mysterious signals from Jimmie, answered by some unseen person. Then, there emerged from beneath the hedge between us and the Baker place—Edward Baker!

Jimmie joined him with every evidence of good-will—and I had imagined that there had been a state of armed warfare between them as there had been between his mother and me!

It was then I disclosed myself.

"What are you and Edward Baker doing, Jimmie?" I asked sternly.

"I was only going fishing with Ab," Jimmie mourned. "He can throw a line better'n any one—better'n Osborn, even."

I looked from one to the other.

"Ab's learned me lots about castin'," Jimmie went on, "an' about flies—he can *make* flies!" he continued proudly. "Ab's all right."

"Jimmie!" I said sternly, "I told you never to use that name again."

"Everybody calls him Ab," said Jimmie sullenly, as he kicked a hole in the earth: and as if this was some excuse, "Ab's all right!" he repeated.

A slow smile spread over the Baker boy's face.

"All the fellows call me Ab, ma'am," he corroborated. "I don't mind." He waited a moment; opened his mouth once or twice, trying to speak. Finally he came out with it. "It ain't me that's refined. It's only Ma and Sylvia."

"That's right," Jimmie nodded cheerfully. "He ain't any more refined than any of us fellows."

Again there was a silence, with which the Baker boy wrestled. Then at last speech came to him again.

"It wasn't because of the nickname I was took sick," he said. "I et too much," he concluded with ponderous simplicity.

"That's right," Jimmie agreed again. "Mrs. Baker gets awful mad if he eats too much: she goes for him fierce," he explained.

"You bet!" said the Baker boy. "So when she said 'twas nervous shock I didn't say nothin'."

And together they went off on their fishing expedition.

Our barn is down near the Bakers' border, and I saw some flowers that needed attention, and went to work at them. Presently Mrs. Baker's head appeared over the hedge. Her face was flushed and something told me that she had heard all our foregoing conversation—in fact, that she had been eavesdropping, although not for anything would she have confessed to such an unladylike and unrefined action. But I do her the justice to believe that her flushed face was due partly to having made such an uncomfortable time for so little reason.

She made amends handsomely, however.

"Mrs. Preston," said she, "I've got a fine new geranium slip that I don't believe you've got in your garden which I wish you'd let me send over to you, if you'd like it."

CHAPTER XII

A MOTHER of a family can never know from which direction a storm may come that will upset the peace of the family. I had listened to Maria telling about an auction for two weeks without any premonition of ill—even when I heard her in the front hall arguing with Jimmie about an oil-can I had no idea what lay before me. I had forgotten that auctions affect Maria as drink does some people.

“We’ll talk no more about it,” Maria announced crisply. “I bought the oil-can and it’s mine; and what would you want with an oil-can of that size, I don’t for a moment see.”

At this Jimmie protested: “I don’t see why it’s more yours than mine—I bid fifty cents and you bid fifty cents. I thought he knocked it down to me.”

I thought it was about time for me to interfere, so I strolled out of my room and asked, with assumed nonchalance:

“What are all these things?”

Well might I ask. For in front of my door, piled high on a wheelbarrow, was the most miscellaneous lot of stuff that I had ever clapped

eyes on. Behind the wheelbarrow, on the piazza, some pieces of furniture were heaped. The negro who had brought the things there was standing, waiting to be paid, and as he heard my words he grinned broadly. That auction had completely upset Maria's sense of values.

When I asked, "What are all these things?" Jimmie said, in tones of deep scorn:

"Aunt Maria's been lootin' Pekin!"

Maria pretended not to hear Jimmie. "You know the auction I've been talking about," she began eagerly. "The people of that house literally never threw away a thing."

"Yes," said Edith, coming out of the library and casting a supercilious eye over Maria's plunder; "and Aunt Maria's bought all the things that they ought to have thrown away long ago!"

Maria again paid no attention to the irreverent remarks of the younger generation, but swam along enthusiastically:

"I got some perfectly splendid stone china—the old kind of unbreakable ware—for the kitchen and I got a whole lot of pictures—only thirty-five cents for the lot!" she went on triumphantly.

The pictures represented such themes as "Baby's First Step," "The Courting," "The Stag at Bay," "Moonlight on Lake Geneva," "A Harem Scene," "Cherries Are Ripe."

"Of course," Maria pursued, "I know the pictures are old-fashioned, but I thought we could take the pictures out and give them to some hospital, and then I could easily clean and varnish the frames and we could frame anything we wanted to. I have a great number of unmounted photographs of the English cathedrals that I have been meaning to do something with for a long time."

Every inch of wall space in Maria's room is already filled, so Edith asked suspiciously:

"Where are you going to hang the English cathedrals?"

"Well," said Maria, "the hall looks bare to me; and besides that you've hardly anything in your own room, you know, and——"

Edith has read a great many things about art and has gone in heavily for simplicity, so she now said, with a decision almost equal to Maria's:

"You needn't think, Aunt Maria, that you can palm off your old English cathedrals on me! I think pictures of buildings are very incongruous on walls, anyway, and I wouldn't have those old frames in my room for anything."

"I don't think you're very gracious about your aunt's offer," I reproved my daughter.

"Well, mother," said Edith, "you know how

Aunt Maria is. If I didn't take an axe those cathedrals——”

“That will do!” said I.

Here Maria caught sight of Jimmie vanishing, lugging something heavy.

“Jimmie!” she cried. “What are you doing with that oil-can?”

Jimmie stuck his head around the corner of the house.

“It's m'own oil-can!” he grumbled. “I was taking it away with me.”

“Editha,” announced Maria, “I appeal to you! I bought that oil-can and paid for it out of my own money. Jimmie, for reasons unknown to me, wants an oil-can—though what good a five-gallon oil-can is to Jimmie, I don't see. I bought it for the house—I heard you say that you needed a new oil-can—and this one was a most wonderful bargain: it was only fifty cents.”

“What else did you buy, Maria?” I asked, anxious to bridge over the difficulty, as Jimmie set down the oil-can with a clatter.

“I got this handsome cuckoo clock,” Maria replied. “I've always wanted a cuckoo clock. I think it would be very nice to hang up in the hall. It doesn't cuckoo now every time it ought to, but that can soon be fixed. Besides that, I got,” she went on, her voice rising exultantly, “a bread-

board. I know, Editha, that you'll say we have a bread-board, but it's no harm to have two," she went on hastily. "And—and I bought a cabinet," continued Maria. "It's a very unique piece of furniture."

It was indeed. It was painted white and resembled an obelisk; it looked like no piece of furniture seen on land or sea. It had a number of little sets of shelves, each smaller than the last and tapering up to a point.

"I thought," said Maria, "of giving it to Jimmie, so that he could make a collection of minerals, but he has been so disagreeable about the oil-can that I shall have it put in my own room and make an archaic cabinet of it. I have a lot of things that I have collected that I have not had a place for hitherto."

Poor Maria! I pitied her; for I knew well enough that she didn't want the funereal cabinet placed in her cosy room, but having bought it, she felt that she had to stand by it.

The negro had gone, but as we stood there talking he wheeled again into the yard. Piled high upon his wheelbarrow were some bulky articles.

"What are those?" I asked.

"Those," said Maria firmly, "are two chicken-coops and a dog-kennel. They were *very* cheap, Editha; it seemed a shame to let them go by. I

thought we might need chicken-coops some day. And the kennel will be good for Piker."

Now Maria knows perfectly well that Piker sleeps in the house; she might as well have suggested a kennel for one of the children as for that spoiled animal.

"I thought," Maria went on aggressively, "I'd *get* the kennel, anyway. And then, if Piker doesn't want it, perhaps Agnes will like it for a playhouse when she comes to visit next week. I think I made a pretty good haul, don't you?"

I could not but confess she had. A five-gallon oil-can, odd pieces of china, a bread-board, a broken cuckoo clock, two chicken-coops, that strange cabinet and a dog-kennel, seemed to me a fine afternoon's work and I said so.

Here Seraphy appeared.

"Th' egg man's here," she said, "an' says d'you want some broilers next week——" Her eye lit upon the contents of the wheelbarrow.

"I've bought you some things for your kitchen, Seraphy," Maria told her genially.

Seraphy's practised eye ran over the stone china, the bread-board, the old chopper and the various kitchen things that Maria had acquired.

"What's them for, Miss Maria?" she asked grimly.

"They are to use, Seraphy," replied Maria.

"It's glad I am to see'm," said Seraphy. "Now Jimmie can't be takin' my regular dishes f'r feedin' his animals in. He can have 'em—the whole lot of 'em—for keepin' pollywogs, or what not."

Maria at this looked crestfallen. She said nothing, but I knew her feelings were wounded.

"It's very kind indeed of you, Maria," I said, "to think of us all—and especially that oil-can. We needed a new oil-can."

"Yes!" Seraphy grumbled. "It was a *new* one we needed. If this keeps on, next time Miss Maria goes to an auction she'd better buy a new cupboard or some shelves—it's so crowded now on my shelves there's no place to lay down th' tooth-pick."

CHAPTER XIII

I WENT to my room, thinking how happy I could be if I were left undisturbed. Here was the house all upset, everybody in it by the ears; besides that, I was worried at the growing antagonism between Jimmie and his aunt. I do so like harmony and it seemed to me as if Jimmie and Maria could never meet without sparks flying. I felt that it was too bad that Jimmie couldn't care more for his aunt and that she couldn't understand the needs of a boy of his age more. I knew, of course, that Jimmie was now sulking because of the oil-can, which he had wanted for some obscure purpose. I felt sorry for him, for after all an oil-can doesn't seem to be a lethal object, and he wanted it very much; and as Seraphy had suggested, it was a *new* oil-can we needed, instead of the bulky one provided by Maria's kindness.

That evening we all went to a lecture upon, "Has Science Proved the Reality of the Unseen?" Maria is far from being a Spiritualist, but I sometimes think she might have been one in another environment, so great a fascination have all oc-

cult topics for her. We talked a moment with the lecturer afterward and he told Maria that she was "psychic." She talked at length about it on the way home.

"I've always suspected," she said, "that I've had peculiar gifts in this direction, though I don't think it's best to dabble with them. Often when I wake up in the night I think I hear music——"

To which Edith replied: "I think that lecturer was a fool!"

"Of course you do, Edith, at your materialistic age," her aunt replied. "One has to live awhile in this world to realise how many unknown elements there are. I do not see why we should not believe that circumstances may arise to render the normally invisible, visible to our eyes. Now, I have always felt that simple people who have no so-called 'scientific ideas' see more than we do. As the man said to-night, it's not for nothing that all savage tribes show such a unanimity in their belief in the Unseen. And take dogs—why, dogs, Editha, make me fairly creep sometimes. I've seen Piker act time and again as if he saw things I couldn't. The way that dog will sit for an hour looking at things in a corner, moaning and his hair bristling, fairly makes the goose-flesh come, I say."

Indeed, this is one of Piker's most disagree-

able traits. He is always stalking around, imagining he sees things, and growling at them.

We had got into our house by that time, and Piker greeted us with his usual demonstrations. Then he ran upstairs and stood in front of Maria's door looking in and whining.

"Look at him now!" Maria exclaimed.

In the light of what we had been hearing, Piker's actions were very peculiar. Maria's room is at the head of the stairs, and Piker looked in through the door, whined and bristled and whined again, and growled softly, as if indeed he saw something.

"Pooh!" said Edith. "It's a June-bug he sees. He always acts that way over June-bugs."

"That's *not* the way he acts over June-bugs!" Maria contradicted. "He paws over June-bugs. I'm going up to see what it is."

She went to the top of the stairs, looked in her room, gave a shriek, and tottered back and sat down on the stair.

"Why, what is it, Maria?" I cried.

"It's Something—Something in my room," replied Maria. "Something strange and nebulous, and as I came in it moved—moved!"

I went upstairs and pushed my way past Maria, Edith following me. From the velvet

blackness of Maria's room, sure enough, there shone out a strange, tall, white object.

Edith walked in, scratched a match, and burst into heartless laughter.

"It's your cabinet, Aunt Maria!" she said. Maria gathered herself up from the stairs.

"I see no cause for so much giggling: anybody would have felt the same as I did," she said with dignity. "But there's one thing certain—I can't sleep with that cabinet in my room. I might wake up in the night and see it there and not know what it was, and there are nervous shocks enough in the world for a sensitive person, without having unnecessary ones."

So Jimmie and Seraphy had to get to work and move the heavy thing out. When Jimmie saw it his eye lit up.

"Say, Aunt Maria, let me buy that off'n you?" he asked.

"You can have it," his aunt replied generously.

Inwardly I groaned, because I saw that bulky, disagreeable piece of furniture fixed on us for all eternity.

In my sleep that night I had strange dreams, dreams that forced themselves into a reality. Presently I found myself wide-awake, listening to a persistent cry. It came:

"Cuckoo! Cuckoo!"

Henry heard me stir and said:

“What’s that infernal noise?”

“I suppose,” I said, “it must be Maria’s cuckoo clock.”

I slipped out of bed and into my dressing-gown and slippers, and lighting a candle, went downstairs. In the hall I met Maria.

“You heard it, too?” she enquired.

“I should say I did!” I replied rather sourly.

“It’s been going on a long time,” said Maria.

All the way downstairs the horrid clock kept on clamouring: “Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Cuckoo!” It was hanging up where Maria had put it, and in the dim light of the candle we could see the little bird clapping its wings and crying out: “Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Cuckoo!”

“It has cuckooed fifty-four times already,” said Maria. “I couldn’t help counting. I happened to be awake in the night and heard it when it began.”

We tried to stop it, but it wouldn’t stop. From over the banisters came Edith’s peevish voice.

“Can’t you stop that miserable clock? It’s waked me up!”

At this Piker began barking furiously. Henry told him to shut up, and then came thumping down the stairs. By the light of the candle we

all three watched the cuckoo o'clock. The bird kept on: "Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Cuckoo!"

"It's cuckooed eighty-four times now," said Maria.

Piker, feeling very officious, jumped up at the wall, trying to catch the bird.

"Lie down, you fool!" said Henry crossly.

We did our best to stop the thing, but it still continued: "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" while Maria counted mechanically:

"One hundred and two, one hundred and three——"

"I know what's happened," she said. "It's an eight-day clock, and it's cuckooing for all the last eight days it hasn't said anything. It's cuckooing them all at once."

At this Henry made a gesture of despair.

"Good heavens!" was all he could say.

Maria is quick at arithmetic.

"That will mean that it will be over twelve hundred times if it does them all." She kept on counting: "One hundred and ninety-six, one hundred and ninety-seven——"

"See here, Maria, this is too much!" said Henry. "We've got to sleep. That thing will keep on for hours more."

"Cuckoo!" said the bird, derisively flapping

his wings. Edith's voice came from over the banisters.

"Is it never going to stop?"

"Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo!" the bird went on as if in answer.

"Maria," said Henry, "did I understand that you *gave* this clock to the house?"

"Yes," said Maria faintly.

"Well, Maria," Henry went on, "since it's ours, will you forgive me if I take matters into my own hands and use drastic measures?"

"Oh, do anything you want to!" Maria wailed. "Only stop that awful noise!"

"Cuckoo, cuckoo!" the bird continued.

Henry got on a chair and took down the clock, the creature cuckooing in his face as he did so. Then there was the noise of breaking wood. The cuckoo was dead. Maria breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'm sorry to do this, Maria," said Henry, "but a clock that's capable of cuckooing over twelve hundred times in the middle of the night has got to have something done to it. And by the way," he went on, "there's a terrible smell of kerosene around. I wonder what it can be!"

The smell indeed had been forcing itself upon my consciousness, but I had been so occupied with the cuckoo clock that I hadn't stopped to notice.

"It seems," said Maria, "to come from the dining-room."

Together we three explored. In the dining-room the smell of kerosene increased, and from thence on to the kitchen. The doors are left open at night through our house, so that the kitchen fire may take off the morning chill. We opened the door of the back kitchen, whence the smell seemed to come, and Piker skipped on ahead. I heard him pattering in something damp. The keen smell of kerosene came to our nostrils. Henry stepped into the room and said:

"Why, this floor is wet!"

Then he retreated into the kitchen.

The flicker of the candle disclosed in the back kitchen a widespread, oozy puddle. It was the five gallons of kerosene, which had leaked out in the night.

Piker, not liking the smell, now pattered back into the house, tracking the kerosene with his wet paws. At this point Henry took off his kerosene-soaked bath-slippers and flung them into the coal-scuttle; and at this Maria collapsed into a chair; her fat face puckered up like a baby's, her chin quivered, and large tears ran down her face.

"Oh!" she wailed. "Think what I've brought you to, Editha! I'm nothing but a useless fifth wheel to the cart—I'm no good to any one in

life. Whenever I try to do any little thing for this family it always comes out wrong—everything's ruined in there! Heaven knows how the thing's going to be cleaned out!" she sobbed.

"Come, come, Maria," I said. "Don't take it to heart. You didn't know. You just tried to do a kindness——"

"Don't talk to me, Editha," she sobbed. "Don't talk to me! I've long known the children had no respect for me; but the worst of it is I know I don't deserve it! I'd better gather my poor little belongings together and go to live in a little place somewhere by myself."

CHAPTER XIV

NEXT morning Maria didn't come down to breakfast, and finally I took it up to her on a tray. I found her quite haggard. The night had brought no peace to her. The only person who saw a silver lining to it was Jimmie, who remarked:

"*Now, p'r'aps, Aunt Maria'll let me have the oil-can!*"

When he came home from school in the afternoon the first thing he asked for was this coveted object. For some reason, it seemed a priceless treasure to Jimmie.

"It's probably out on the ash-heap," I told him. "Seraphy carried it out there."

He went out and searched for it and came in storming.

"Yes," said Maria, "I told the man to take it away. I didn't want the horrid thing around, after all the trouble it's caused."

By this time she was more cheerful. Somehow she had shifted the responsibility of the affair to the can itself.

"Gone!" cried Jimmie. "My can gone!"

"I didn't want it around," Maria repeated stinately.

"I wanted to try a scientific experiment with it can. A feller never can do anything but men interfere with him!" Jimmie stormed. Maria was in a softer mood than usual.

"Jimmie," she said, "I didn't realise that you illy wanted the can. I'll give you the two hen-ops and the dog-house."

I had thought that perhaps, after this catas-rophe, I could unostentatiously get rid of the hen-ops and kennel; but now I knew they would be th us always. For there are so many things in ue world that Jimmie can't have and can't do that those that he can do I never interfere with.

All that afternoon Jimmie was very busy about something in the garden, hammering and sawing. He seemed to be taking the hen-coops apart. I was resting in my room when I heard Maria cry:

"For heaven's sake, Editha, come and see what's this!"

I looked out of the window, and down by the big apple-tree I saw the kennel, swinging in mid-air. It was slowly ascending into the big apple-tree. Jimmie himself was up in the tree, directing operations, while little boys pulled at a block and tackle. At the same moment I heard Seraphy's shrill voice crying:

"Ye limbs of Satan! Give me me new clothes-line! 'Tis me good new clothes-line they've got strung aroun' that dog-kennel! An' whatever they're doin' with it in th' tree, I dunno!"

With weary footsteps I went down to the garden. I arrived there just in time to see Jimmie and another boy, standing perilously among the branches, grasp the dog-kennel as it came up and place it on a platform that they had hammered on the limbs of the tree. The foundations of the platform tipped slightly, and the limbs bent and swayed under the weight of the dog-kennel: but the boys looked upon their handiwork with joy.

"What is this?" I called to Jimmie.

"Father said I could!" he called back belligerently. "I asked him myself at dinner to-day and he said I might! It's our club-house. You know my book that tells boys how to do things? Well, it tells you how to build a club-house forty feet above the ground—this ain't forty feet."

"No, thank God!" I groaned.

It seemed to me that day that I just couldn't bear having that dog-kennel staring me in the face up in the apple-tree; and it seemed so to Maria, too. She spent the evening groaning about what she had brought us all to and prophesying darkly that the boys would break their necks—or any-

way, their arms and legs; which I thought only too likely.

In the days that followed Maria was subdued. She said nothing about the boys whooping around the place; for the whole gang that Jimmie belongs to now circled around our apple-tree, although only two of them at a time could get into the clubhouse. She made no suggestion about bringing up the children. From time to time she talked about what a burden she was to me.

It was shortly after this that some neighbours held an auction of such of their household goods as they were not going to take with them when they moved, and at the end of the auction Maria appeared before me her old cheerful self.

"Editha," she said, "I feel that I owe you something for all the trouble I've caused you. I went to the Tylers' auction—I didn't buy a thing—not a thing, although I saw several objects that I would have liked to have; but not knowing how they would turn out once I got them home, I refrained. The only thing I did get was an oil-can. I felt at least I owed you that. It's a perfectly good oil-can—very much like the—the other. I had to pay more for it, of course—I suppose because it *is* a good can."

"Thank you, Maria," I said; "you're very thoughtful."

We kissed each other, and I felt that the Dove of Peace had again descended upon us. Seraphy alone eyed the oil-can with suspicion.

"It looks th' broth an' bilin' of th' other!" she muttered.

"Well," Maria exclaimed tartly, "I don't suppose that other oil-can was the only one there was of that make. They're old-fashioned in some ways, but made of sterling material."

That same evening we were all sitting around the evening lamp when Seraphy came to us.

"I wish ye'd come out, Mis' Preston, an' look at th' back kitchen."

Her request was a command. I followed meekly, as did Maria and Jimmie.

The oil-can sat in its accustomed place. All around it an oily liquid made a dark ring.

"Miss Maria seems to have a likin' f'r leaky cans," said Seraphy sourly.

"Why!" cried Jimmie joyously, "that's my oil-can—the one that Aunt Maria took away an' then gave away on me!"

Maria looked at the dark ring of oil that was creeping slowly across the back kitchen floor, but:

"Nonsense, Jimmie!" Maria said. "That's not the same oil-can! It may leak, but it's not the same can."

Jimmie went over and looked at it carefully.

"Yes, 'tis, too," he asserted. "I know it, 'cause of this thing that's scratched on it. It's the same old can—it's my can."

"But how——" gasped Maria. "How—— I sent a man for it that morning!"

"Never a man then came, ma'am," said Seraphy. "In th' mornin' it was settin' out on th' ash-heap, an' I saw that fresh Tyler kid—and a good thing it is they've moved off—foolin' around an' I saw th' oil-can, plain's I see it now; an' next I looks out th' can's gone an' th' Tyler kid's gone, an' I didn't think nothin' more of it."

"Oh!" cried Maria. "What an imposition! What a woman that Mrs. Tyler must be, to sit there and let me buy back a can that her boy sneaked off our own ash-heap!"

But here Seraphy burst into cackles of mirth. My old cook laughs but rarely and it is a fearsome sound when she does. She cackled and cackled away like a hen that has just laid an egg. She cackled as if she would never stop. Tears of mirth ran down her gaunt, withered cheeks.

"It's one on you, Miss Maria!" she gasped. "It's one on you!"

Maria glared at the oil-can.

"When I think that, all told, I have paid one dollar and twenty-five cents for that miserable thing—when I think that I bought it over again—

it's enough to shake my faith in an overruling Providence!" she cried, and left the kitchen.

When I went to bed that night Maria called me into her room, and I will say that I pitied her. The only way I can describe her is to say that the starch was taken out of her.

"Editha," she said, "I'm just about to go away and visit for a week. I don't feel that I can face the jeers from your children."

"They won't jeer at you, Maria," I soothed her.

"Even if you keep them from openly expressing what they feel," answered poor Maria, "I shall know what they're thinking. I can't bear it."

"Oh, come, Maria," I said, "you can't go away next week. I need you. Estelle's coming to visit—and Agnes." Agnes is my little niece who has not visited us since she was a baby, but who, Maria has always asserted, is a perfectly brought-up child.

Here Jimmie sneaked into the room. Something about his aunt's dejection touched a chord in his perverse soul. He, too, did things that went wrong. He, too, was blamed and laughed at for not being helpful. For the first time in his life, perhaps, his Aunt Maria's emotions were comprehensible to him. For once she was the one

in the wrong, the under dog, the way he so frequently was, and he pitied her.

"Aw, come off, Aunt Maria," he said awkwardly. "Nobody's goin' to josh you about this. Aw, don't go way, Aunt Maria." He searched around in his mind for some inducement to stay, and a luminous idea came to him. "You stay, Aunt Maria," he exclaimed, his face alight with a happy thought. "You stay, an' I'll put a ladder up to my club-house an' boost you up into it, if you want to!"

Maria looked at Jimmie gratefully. For a second of time the gulf which separates a stout, middle-aged maiden lady and a little boy of twelve was bridged. She understood all that this offer meant. With unmistakable gratitude in her face, she said:

"Jimmie, you're a nice little boy, and I shan't forget it."

CHAPTER XV

FOR years Maria has upheld Agnes, my little niece, as the model of all children and Estelle as a peerless mother. This has sometimes been a cause of mild irritation with me, for naturally I did not like to be told that with my greater experience I had not brought up my family as well as Estelle. When she arrived I was glad to see that she was not quite so impeccable as Maria had painted her, but the crucial scene which showed us the real Agnes began in Maria's own sitting-room. Agnes was playing in the corner. Her starched white pique, with little ruffles and a fascinating rosette on each shoulder, had a bedraggled appearance. Her hair matched her dress. Estelle looked at her daughter rather wearily, I thought.

"I'm sure," said she, "I don't see why that child should get so much dirtier here than at home. Once I dress her for the afternoon at home, she's just as careful about her clothes: but here it really doesn't pay to dress her up. She's dirty as a little pig ten minutes afterwards."

Agnes had apparently been oblivious of all our

grown-up conversation. She now remarked with that distinct pronunciation for which Maria has always so praised her:

"I like pigs," and resumed her play.

What happened next wouldn't have been so bad if Maria's intimate friend, Mrs. Silbey, hadn't arrived at that moment for a cup of tea. She brought with her her starched and ruffled little girl, Lucy. Agnes had looked at the newcomer and kept on playing serenely, with the admirable indifference of childhood.

"Come and speak to the little girl, dear," suggested Maria.

"Don't you want to play with that nice little girl?" asked Estelle.

"And so this is little Agnes. What are you playing, dear?" said Mrs. Silbey.

They all spoke at the same time. Agnes answered only one of these questions.

"Playing with angleworms," she said, with her characteristic distinctness.

"What!" said Maria.

"What's that, darling?" said Estelle. While Mrs. Silbey only said:

"Dear me!"

"Worms, I said," replied Agnes, unperturbed. "Worms. I'm playing with them. *She* can play with them, too, if she wants to—only she mustn't

squash 'em. They squish awful easy if you're not careful. I've squashed two already, and they won't last if they keep on getting squashed like that."

There was a silence after this. Lucy was the first to break it.

"I don't think I care to play with them, mama," she remarked.

"Do you mean, Agnes," said Estelle, with strained politeness, "that you're playing with earthworms in your Aunt Maria's room?"

"Yes, mama," replied Agnes, with prompt cheerfulness. "I dug 'em myself—I dug 'em where Jimmie gets his fish-worms. Worms grow awful large in this town. At home I never find any but little weeny ones in puddles; but here they're just as long—as long——"

A shiver ran through the room.

"Hasn't mama often told you not to say 'awful,' darling?" was the inadequate thing that poor Estelle was able to bring out.

There ensued, for a moment, silence; then Estelle gathered herself together. She has certain theories about the independence of the child, and directing a child's mind, and things of that kind.

"I don't think that worms are a very nice thing to play with, do you, dear?" she began.

"Yes, mama," replied Agnes. "I like worms,"

she went on, with dreamy eyes directed toward Maria, who sat rigid at the idea of a box of worms in her immaculate sitting-room. "I like them; they move both ways; they haven't any feelings. I don't think that they even mind being squashed—much. They're only full of earth, anyhow. They——"

But Estelle was in no mood for listening to Agnes' studies of the earthworm.

"Carry them right out of doors, darling, and throw them away. I know your Aunt Maria doesn't like worms in her room."

"Why not, mama?" asked Agnes.

Estelle is one of those women who always give their children reasons. This time, however, the good old method which I personally have found much more successful in the rearing of a family prevailed.

"Don't ask me why, Agnes," she said; and, though her voice was sweet, I knew the tension which was underneath. "Take those worms right out of doors—please," she added.

"I don't see why, mama," said Agnes. "You don't tell me why."

"Don't argue with me, Agnes," said Estelle. "Take those worms away, as I've told you to do."

At this Agnes lifted up her voice and wept.

"I can't have cats," she wailed, "nor dogs—

they track dirt. Worms don't track anything; they don't make any noise; and I can't even have them. And she won't tell me her *reasons*," added this modern child.

There are times when the old-fashioned methods will prevail, even with the child-culturist. Scratch the child-culturist and you will find a human being. Estelle picked up the box of worms with one hand and took her daughter with the other.

"Ow! You're hurting me, mama! Ow! You stepped on me!"

With an exclamation of disgust, Estelle hurried from the room, holding her daughter's pets in one hand and her daughter in the other. I noticed a long slimy streak on Maria's clean floor.

Estelle returned after a moment with a set expression that I had never before seen upon her; then conversation tried to take its natural course.

CHAPTER XVI

IT was not long before Agnes came back. Her crumpled white dress had been changed to a clean checked pinafore and her face and hands were washed.

"Here comes my dear little daughter," said Estelle approvingly. "I told her," she explained, "that she might come back after she was reasonable again."

"Now you can play with this dear little girl if you want to," said Maria.

Lucy came forward shyly. Agnes, however, only smiled at Lucy encouragingly, but let her suggestions for games fall flat. I noticed that Agnes' left hand was closed with suspicious firmness—not having two available hands impedes one in the playing of any game. Estelle noticed it, too.

"What have you got in your hand, darling?" she asked.

Agnes opened her little right hand and held it up with a guileless, wondering air, as though surprised that her mother should ask such a question. Estelle flushed ever so slightly.

"Your other hand, I mean," she said.

Agnes clenched her other pink fist tightly. She shuffled her feet.

"Nothing, mamma," she said.

"Agnes, open your hand," said Estelle.

Then came a wail from Lucy.

"Ow!" she screamed. "It's a worm—I saw its head wiggle; she's got a worm in her hand, mother! She's got another worm!"

"Agnes," began Estelle, with anger which was meant to be just and firm, "mother's surprised——"

But this was too much for Agnes. She stamped her foot.

"He wasn't hurting anybody!" she roared. "He was a clean one—I washed him off—I washed him off in the basin in our room and I washed my hands. He was just as clean—as clean—and now she went and told on me! Here, take it!" she said; and, throwing a long, shiny, pink worm upon Lucy, she fled from the room.

We were quite busy for the next few minutes, because, as Mrs. Silbey says, Lucy is one of those nervous, high-strung children, and she considered this an appropriate time for showing how nervous and high-strung she could be. We calmed her down after a while—it took cake and preserves to do it. After they had gone:

"Estelle," said Maria, "I feel there is only

one thing to do. I know your theories are against it. Still I feel there is only one kind of punishment that will impress this sufficiently upon Agnes. You don't respect your own mother any the less because, when you were young, she—ah—punished you."

Estelle rocked back and forth desperately.

"I can't do it, Sister Maria," she moaned. "I can't do it! It seems to me an awful thing to strike a defenceless child."

"I'm not talking of striking a defenceless child," said Maria. "I wouldn't tell any one to *strike* any child. What I'm talking about, Estelle, is a good old-fashioned spanking—if you ask me what Agnes needs! I tell you, Estelle, you'll have trouble yet with Agnes, if you don't nip her right in the bud."

Estelle went gloomily to her own room to think it over.

"It don't seem to me that Agnes has done anything so very dreadful, Maria," I remonstrated, "and I think it's a great pity to spoil Estelle's visit by putting ideas like that in her head."

"If justice were justice," Maria replied cryptically, "Agnes isn't the only one in this house that ought to be spanked."

With that I fully agreed, though the person

that I thought needed the spanking was not poor Jimmie.

Later Estelle returned pale and spent with her struggle.

"You may be right, Sister Maria," she said, "but I shall have to talk it over with William before I take any decisive step in the matter. I wouldn't take the responsibility of punishing Agnes—in the way you suggest—without his consent." Then she broke down altogether. "Oh, I can't do it!" she wailed. "I can't do it!"

Meantime the culprit had been let out of her room while sentence was pending, and had given a bond of good behaviour. Agnes is an astute child and understood perfectly what was in the air, as I found by her telling Jimmie all about it.

"It's all Aunt Maria," he growled to me: and here chivalry, I think, awoke for the first time in his breast. "It's a mean shame to lick a little girl like that, just 'cause she's got sand and ain't afraid of things. Soon's girls ain't afraid of things, then Aunt Maria wants to lick 'em!" And he went sulkily from the room.

Later I observed him showing his rabbits to Agnes.

Ever since Agnes' arrival he has been skulking about in corners, trying to avoid her brazen, feminine advances, for to be kissed by a girl, however

small, seems to Jimmie unbearable. Then, too, he had a natural antipathy to Agnes because he had heard about her perfections from his Aunt Maria. So I was surprised at this budding sign of humanity.

The trouble with Agnes is that she knows all about child-culture, too. She knows that a child ought to have her independence and ought to be given reasons, and that it is very, very wrong for a mother to spank a child, just as well as Estelle or William do—though William didn't know that spanking was wrong until he married Estelle.

When he came home with Henry that evening the whole matter was put before him. His first speech betrayed the normal man's point of view.

"Spank her," he told his wife "if you want to. But you needn't expect me to interfere. Manage it the way you feel you ought to."

"I can't do it, William," said Estelle. "I'm in daily contact with the child. It will mean more to her and at the same time shock her less, coming from you."

Meantime, Agnes hovered upon the outside of the discussion. She didn't want to be spanked, but she had a morbid curiosity about it. She never had been spanked; there was attraction of the unknown to her in the possibility of its happen-

ing to her. The whole subject fascinated her immensely, and not along the paths of repentance that Maria and Estelle would have hoped for.

"Were you ever spanked?" I heard her asking Jimmie.

"Lots of times," said Jimmie.

"Who spanked you?" asked Agnes, with her morbid curiosity to the fore.

"Sometimes father, but mostly ma," replied Jimmie laconically. "'Tain't nothin'," he went on. "Don't you care, Agnes. They won't spank you hard, anyway."

"I don't believe they'll spank me," said Agnes. "Perhaps mama will—and if she does," she added vindictively, "I'll never love her any more. But if mama makes papa do it, he won't," continued this student of human nature.

After tea Estelle and William walked up and down in front of the house and the whole thing was decided. I saw at once from poor William's manner just what had happened when they came in together. Agnes was to be spanked and he was to do it. Gloom settled upon our family circle. Estelle even had appointed an hour for the execution—for that was the way they acted about it—so that they could both feel sure that there was neither anger nor injustice in it.

At ten-thirty the next morning Agnes was to be spanked.

This information had been imparted to Agnes, but it did not seem to have the subduing effect on her that it should have had. She was provokingly jaunty over the whole matter—showing off, I think, to Jimmie, that she could take a spanking as well as any boy.

Estelle and William looked at their daughter with sad, pain-stricken eyes, while Agnes ignored them both.

“You see,” Maria said, “she needs it. Nothing else will settle her.”

And to prove how much she needed it, the well-trained, perfect Agnes here stuck out her tongue at her Aunt Maria.

William and Estelle waited for the fatal hour with every appearance of guilt; and William tried to wriggle out of it. I could hear him saying things like: “You’d better do it, after all, Estelle. My hand’s too heavy; I might hit her harder than I intended to.”

At which Estelle would shiver resolutely. “No, William, it would be better coming from you.”

At exactly twenty-five minutes past ten Estelle led the child upstairs. It was only now that it fully came home to Agnes what was going to happen. She began to weep. William followed

moodily, acting as though he were about to murder his daughter. Then from above I heard loud yells and screams from Agnes. But louder than these I heard Estelle's voice. The child-culturist had vanished: the reasonable woman had vanished; there remained nothing but the primitive mother fighting for her young. In a voice shrill beyond recognition I heard her cry:

"You shall not strike that child, William! Give her to me! I will not have my child struck by you!"

"But you told me to spank her!" came William's voice. "She's been naughty and you told me to spank her."

"I won't have you strike Agnes!" Estelle screamed hysterically. "Nobody shall strike her. I don't care if she *has* been naughty. If anybody ever strikes her it shall be me. Leave her alone, William Travers! Give me my child!" came the shrill voice of the primitive mother; and she bore her unspanked and unrepentant daughter into another room and slammed the door, where I heard her soothing the indignant roars of Agnes.

Poor William came downstairs dazed. He hadn't wanted to spank Agnes; he had been bullied into it and then he had been berated for trying to do what he didn't want to do.

Henry, who, together with me, had heard the

whole scene, met him in the hall. He slapped William on the back.

“Don’t you care, old fellow,” I heard him say, “I don’t understand women, either.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE day after Agnes was not spanked Maria came down to breakfast very much agitated.

"When I got out of bed this morning," she announced, with a gravity that was portentous, "I started to walk about the floor. I stepped on a small sharp object. It hurt me a great deal—you know, I put my heels down quite hard. I looked to see what had hurt me and here they are!" She displayed two small white objects.

"Why," said Estelle, "those are teeth!"

"Of all things!" said Maria. "Teeth! *Small children's teeth!* Will you tell me how children's teeth got in my room?"

"Perhaps Agnes dropped hers there," Osborn suggested.

"No, Osborn, I didn't," said Agnes seriously, and while she spoke with perfect self-command, a flush spread over her face.

"*Some one* must have dropped them in my room," Maria asserted accusingly. "Why, Edith, it gave me a start when I found a tooth fairly embedded in my heel!"

Maria looked from Jimmie to Agnes and then back again to Jimmie.

"Do you know anything about these teeth, Jimmie?" she asked.

Here Edith came to the rescue. "It takes away my appetite to talk about such horrid things at the table!" she cried. "Oh, I should think you would have thrown them out of the window, instead of holding an inquest over them at the breakfast-table!"

"That will do, Edith," I said.

"It must be about time for Agnes to lose hers," pursued Maria.

"Oh, mama!" cried Agnes, "will I lose a tooth? Will I?" She lifted her upper lip and displayed to view her little white teeth. "I've got one I think is a little eeny teeny weeny bit loose."

"You're interrupting your Aunt Maria!" Estelle reminded her daughter.

"How will you pull my tooth out?" asked Agnes, unconcerned. "Will you tie a string around it and to the door and slam the door?"

"We'll talk about it when the time comes," Estelle replied evenly.

Here Jimmie threw a warning glance at Agnes, but Agnes paid no attention.

"Maud Ellis tied hers to a flat-iron and then let it drop," she announced with relish; at which Edith turned up her nose, and Osborn, noticing

his sister's disgust, enquired in a pleasant conversational tone:

"How many teeth has Maud lost?"

"Two," replied Agnes promptly, "and," she continued in a tone of rising exultation, "she's going to lose some more soon."

"It seems to make you pretty happy," said Osborn.

Again Jimmie scowled with meaning, but Agnes looked demurely at her plate.

"Dear me!" Maria mused, "I had forgotten all about children shedding teeth—it's so long since any of our children shed any."

Here Edith, who has lately been developing a great many sensibilities, ostentatiously left the table.

Jimmie is as transparent as a piece of glass and I saw easily enough that there was something up between him and Agnes; but I've learned to turn a blind eye to a great many things. Estelle, however, has not been a mother long enough to have learned the valuable lesson of ignoring things.

"What do you suppose Jimmie meant?" she asked me. "I heard him say to Agnes, 'You better cheese it; if they get on to you, they won't let you any more.' 'Why won't they let me?'" Agnes asked, and Jimmie said, "'Cause grown people won't never let no one do nothing.' 'Any-

way,' said Agnes, 'mama's never told me not to!' Now, what do you suppose they were talking about?"

"Why don't you ask Agnes?" I suggested. I fancied Estelle blushed a little.

"I have always told Agnes," she replied, "never to ask questions about things she has overheard, and I must be consistent, Sister Editha."

I had yet to have the tooth episode out with Maria. She came to me soon after breakfast, saying:

"Editha, I seldom interfere with your household; but I simply must protest when it comes to having teeth embedded in my bare flesh, *in my own room.*"

"I don't think you need worry about it, Maria," I said soothingly; "I don't think it will happen again."

"What has happened once," said Maria firmly, "can *always* happen again. I wish to be able to walk across my room in my bare feet without the fear of finding a human tooth in my heel; and I think that you, Editha, should make a thorough investigation as to how those teeth got there."

"How should you suggest that I go about it, Maria?" I asked, though I knew well enough what Maria wanted. It was to fasten those teeth on Jimmie.

"Put a stop to it; you can do it, if you choose," she said, and walked out of the room with dignity. Hardly had she left when Seraphy appeared. She brandished a feather-duster which had the air of an old hen with ragged tail-feathers. I eyed this object askance.

"Well may ye look!" said she. "'Tis the new one ye bought last week! Yes, ma'am, it is! Miss Maria can talk all she likes about Jimmie, and from now till even about Agnes bein' an angel, but 'tis Agnes is behind doors pickin' feathers out o' new dusters! I don't say nothin' about stealin' pickles with naked hands out o' jars; children is children and pickles is pickles. If there was a key to the butt'ry, like I've always said there'd oughter be—but there, it ain't about pickles I come to talk, nor about what Agnes' pocket's full of; for if her ma ain't found out, Lord knows, it ain't no business of mine; all I have to say is that Jimmie's blamed for a lot of things, though 'tis others does 'em! I'm sayin' no names, mind you—but when it comes to sittin' back with my two hands folded, while feathers, bunches and bunches of feathers, ma'am, is picked out o' that duster before my naked eyes, I say Agnes is a sly one and them feathers is bein' picked out for no good! There's things on foot in this house more than no one knows," Seraphy

went on darkly, "but I ain't openin' my mouth, nor will I, not unless it comes to rooinin' furniture and pickin' feather-dusters bare. No'm, I ain't openin' *my* mouth, not if all my corks *is* stole."

Having thus unbosomed herself, Seraphy strode from the room, the denuded feather-duster held stiffly in her grim fist.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was next day when Estelle came to me saying:

“Look at these strange lumps I’ve found stuck all around on the under side of Agnes’ little bed!”

Maria took one of the little greyish lumps gingerly in her hand. “That’s gum!” she pronounced.

“Gum?” Estelle quavered.

“Gum,” Maria asserted firmly, “chewing-gum, Estelle.”

They looked at each other a moment; then Estelle said with some dignity, “My child does not chew gum, Sister Maria.”

“I don’t say she does,” said Maria. “I should not have supposed Agnes would. But children are very imitative—look at her now,” she added.

Agnes just then came into view, Jimmie with her, although he was apparently unconscious of her presence. Agnes appeared to be munching something. As she came nearer she stopped.

“My little girl doesn’t eat things between meals, does she?” asked Estelle sweetly.

“No, mama,” replied Agnes; but Maria stuck

to her theory of the inexplicable working of Agnes' jaws.

"Open your mouth, dear," she said with treacherous sweetness; and before any one could prevent it, she popped a searching forefinger into her niece's mouth. Unmindful of Agnes' scream, she extracted an able-bodied piece of chewing-gum, which she held aloft between a disgusted finger and thumb.

"Why, Agnes!" cried Estelle. "Why, *Agnes!*"

"You never told me not to, mama; you never told me not to! You never once in your life told me not to chew gum!" cried Agnes, dancing up and down in an agony of self-defence.

"You have been deceiving your mother," said Estelle in grieved tones. She led Agnes out of the room. I have no doubt there was a painful scene. Presently Estelle returned alone.

"I'm afraid, Sister Maria," said she, "it can't go on any longer. I should like to let things work out as you advise; but when it comes to my child chewing *gum* behind my back, then the time has come for me to investigate all her actions thoroughly."

"How on earth, Estelle, did Agnes come to do such a thing?" Maria wished to know.

"She says," Estelle replied, "that Jimmie gave her the gum as a reward for not kissing him; I'm

afraid, Sister Editha, that I don't understand Jimmie!"

You see, I was attacked from all sides—Maria, Seraphy and Estelle all clamouring to me to find out what it was Jimmie and Agnes were up to; for it was as plain as the nose on your face that they were up to something. And here I will say that it was not that innocent angel, Agnes, who gave things away, but my poor, hardened Jimmie. Even at six and a half, Agnes would have known better than to steal furtively from bush to bush if she wanted to hide herself from view. The difference between them was that Agnes was playing a real game of intrigue against the grown-up world, and especially against child culture as embodied in her mother, while Jimmie was hiding principally from imaginary foes, playing over again one of the immortal dramas of childhood.

I tried to hint to Estelle that children, it seemed to me, had some right to privacy in the carrying out of their make-believe games, and that too much prying begets secrecy; but she only wailed:

"How shall I guide her mind if I don't know what's in it? It used to be like a little clear spring of water, but now it's all clouded!"

What was clouding it Estelle was shortly to learn, and from Edith, who had been carrying

on investigations of her own. She gave us the benefit of them, with the hostile, chip-on-the-shoulder sort of air which she so affects of late.

"I know," she said, "that Aunt Maria thinks that Agnes is perfect, and so she probably won't see anything in what I've got to tell. But what I want to know is, does Aunt Estelle know that Agnes is making a collection of teeth?"

"What do you mean, Edith?" I asked.

"I mean that she's making a collection of teeth. She's broken her string of coral beads and she is paying a bead a tooth. Every sort of teeth she buys—dogs' teeth or any kind; but what she likes best is children's teeth. May Ellis' little sister has lost four teeth already, and Agnes has bought 'em all. May says, when she has lost the next two that are loose, her sister is going to have the beads set in a brooch, and I want to know, does Aunt Estelle know about this?"

There was a dramatic pause. Maria said two or three times, "Well, of all things!" and Edith demanded again, "Did you know, Aunt Estelle?"

"No," poor Estelle answered at last, "I didn't!"

"Well," said Edith, with the brutality of her years, "everybody else in town does, then; all the girls are laughing about it. I haven't been able to go anywhere for two days without the girls asking how Agnes' collection of ivories is getting along!"

Don't frown at me, mother! I'm going to tell Aunt Maria and Aunt Estelle what I think about it. I call it ghastly—that's what I call it!"

"But I never see Agnes playing with any little girls," wailed Estelle.

"She don't play with girls; all she plays with is boys—big boys. She's a very queer child, if she is my cousin. She just sits by the hole in the fence and swaps beads for teeth through it. And then she goes behind the lilacs, and Jimmie and his gang wait for her there."

"Well," said Maria resignedly, "it only shows how mistaken we can be in people. I should never have dreamed Agnes had tastes like that! She has always seemed like the best, sweetest child, and so interested in things beyond her years! Why, she is always wanting me to read her about the conversion of the heathen. Just this morning I was reading her aloud, for the tenth time, Dr. Leupp's 'A Missionary in the Caribbeans,' and the child is all ears for any good reading of that kind. *Do you suppose,*" asked Maria, as a hot, unpleasant thought smote through her consciousness, "*do you suppose* that she is interested only in the savage rites of those cannibals, instead of their conversion?"

I will say, to Estelle's credit, that even at this tragic moment she smiled.

"Well," she announced briskly, "I purpose to find out why my Agnes is making a collection of teeth, and what she does with them, after she gets them. Where did you say, Edith, that she and Jimmie play?"

"Behind the lilacs," said Edith. "Seraphy found them out; she says Agnes is sitting on a soap-box, with a croquet-ball in her hand, saying she's going to eat a missionary before the moon is old. All the boys in the neighbourhood are there too—'blacked up like nagurs' Seraphy says, 'with tails like roosters on 'em.' She says that was a bad day for the feather-dusters of this town when Agnes first clapped her foot in it."

"This is no time for joking, Edith," Maria interposed severely.

"I'm not joking, Aunt Maria. I think it's disgusting," replied Edith. "Come and see for yourself."

CHAPTER XIX

WE bore down on the lilac clump, which leaves a small open space between the hedge and itself. It is the most secluded spot in our grounds. We ducked through the bushes quietly after Edith. As we came near, we heard the cautious, rhythmic beating which I had vaguely noticed of late coming from that part of the garden. Even my dull ears easily recognised this sound as the beating of the tom-tom. Edith lifted a branch of the lilacs and we peered into the little enclosure beyond. There, seated on the soap-box, was Agnes. In one hand she held the croquet-ball; around her neck was a necklace of small, white objects. I was near enough to see that the necklace was made of teeth. Beside the soap-box stood Jimmie. He was black in the face and arrayed in savage wise; a billet of wood swung across his shoulder; round his waist was a fringe of feathers. A knot of boys disputed in fierce undertones while the fat boy whom I knew as Ab solemnly beat the tom-tom with two chicken-bones. They were all blackened and all wore feathers about their waists.

"I'm going to be et to-day," I heard one say; "Jimmie said I'd be et to-day."

"Aw, go on, you've been et a'ready: it's my turn to be et."

"Cheese it, fellers," Jimmie broke in at this point. "Shut up; you make such a row, you c'n be heard a mile." Then, dropping into a tone of lofty grandiloquence, "Only to-day I saw the pale-faced missionary skulking on our trail."

This had a magical effect; the dispute was quelled and each boy dropped into his part.

"Who brings tribute?" cried Jimmie. "Who has slain an enemy to-day? Who brings pearls for the princess' necklace?"

"I," cried the little boy who had spoken. "I bring tribute." Then, in a casual conversational tone, "I got two teeth offern m'sister; that's why I thought I might be the one to be et."

"Well, you can't, so shut up," said Jimmie tersely. "Bring forward the tribute. Oodoo! Get down and crawl. You gotter crawl up to the princess, you know."

"Aw, what's the good of crawlin' up to a girl?" asked the boy.

"See here," said Jimmie, his hand extended in gesture, "that ain't a girl—I don't have girls around! That's the princess o' this tribe. There

ain't one o' you kids can sneak feathers like her. She thought o' the human sacrifice, too."

"Aunt Maria read it out of a book to me," Agnes piped up.

"There you are," said Jimmie. "She thought o' the teeth necklace."

"Aw, I don't want ter crawl," said the sulky youth.

"He's gotter crawl, ain't he, Jimmie?" cried the tribe.

"It's written in the book they crawl," piped Agnes. "If he don't crawl, I won't dance a cannibal dance."

"Well, you dance first, an' I'll crawl after," the boy agreed.

"The princess dances!" cried Jimmie, in the voice of a herald.

Agnes arose from her soap-box. "Here, Jimmie," she said in her distinct way, "you hold my necklace; the teeth keep dropping out of the chewing-gum!" Then she advanced to the middle of the enclosure, lifting her feet high in measure to the tom-tom, rolling her eyes around in savage wildness.

Fascinated, we watched the performance; for Agnes, the decorous, the well-behaved, the model child, was changed before our eyes into a wild, primitive aborigine, while, with savage gestures,

she danced what seemed a cross between some mad, primæval cake-walk and the Indian war-dance seen in the shows of Buffalo Bill. In its way it was quite a triumphant performance, but it did not so appear to Estelle. For a time she watched her daughter in a frozen fascination, then she cried out:

“Agnes!” And at her word the heart of Africa died. It was like the things one reads in fairy stories—the enchantment was over. What had been brave cannibal warriors turned into shame-faced little boys blackened up with burnt cork, who crawled into bushes. Everywhere one saw the hinder parts of breeches in full retreat. The tom-tom was deserted, the soap-box tipped over, the croquet-ball rolled lazily across the enclosure, while tufts of feathers, pulled off in the scramble, festooned the lilac-bushes. Jimmie and Agnes alone remained face to face with the avenging Estelle.

It is in crises like these, I think, that the child-culturist falls down. I shall always feel that Estelle’s “What was my little girl doing?” was a highly inadequate remark under the circumstances, and opened the gate to Agnes’ indignant roar, starting with the long-drawn, ascendant “O-o-o” of childhood, and ending with “I can’t ever have any fun!”

"This is not a suitable sort of fun," Estelle told her daughter sternly, as she led Agnes away; and, as she walked off, Maria thought it an appropriate time to say to me:

"I am disappointed in the results of Estelle's training. In a crisis she lacks firmness as much as you do, Editha."

Later in the afternoon Estelle came to me.

"I'm sure you'll understand, Sister Editha, why I feel I must cut my visit short. Agnes' nerves are quite unstrung, and while I think Jimmie is a dear little boy, he is too old to be a companion for Agnes." Which, of course, was just another way of saying that everything that had happened was, somehow or other, all Jimmie's fault again.

After Agnes had gone, Jimmie followed me to my room. He walked about, pulling a leaf from my plant and fingering things upon my dressing-table. I saw that he was getting ready to say something. At last he jerked it out:

"Have you gotter little box?"

"How big a box, Jimmie?" I asked. "What for?"

He hesitated, with momentary distrust; then he decided to risk it.

"Big enough to hold this," he answered, defiance lurking in his tone. He carefully took out of his pocket a piece of string. Along its length

were lumps of chewing-gum, and in each lump of gum was set a tooth. It was the princess' necklace.

"Sealing-wax would er held 'em better," Jimmie mused, as he looked at the treasure. Then he burst out:

"Aunt Estelle makes me sick! She wouldn't let her have it; so I'm going to save it for next year."

Then, as he put the necklace into the box, there sounded the first note of sentiment that I had ever heard from Jimmie; for it was with something like tenderness that he said:

"She worked hard to collect those teeth!"

CHAPTER XX

AFTER Agnes and Estelle left, the house settled down to a comparative quiet. School was drawing to a close: the children were showing that ardour for learning which overtakes young people as examination time approaches.

I was glad school was almost over, for Edith takes home economics this year and I am tired of the confusion she creates in the kitchen when she cooks. She came in from what she calls "stirring up a cake" to the piazza where Maria and I were sitting and demanded:

"How much does the light we burn vary between summer and winter, and what relation has it to the daylight?"

"Mercy, Edith, how do you expect me to know things like that?" said I.

"Don't you know how much electricity we burn?" Edith asked.

"I know approximately," I said. "What I do know is that the bills are very much larger than they would be if you children turned out the lights when you left the rooms."

"Bravo!" came from Maria. "Editha, I am glad to see you show a little spirit once when your

children talk to you. Perhaps after a while you won't let yourself be trampled under foot so."

Edith presently returned to the charge.

"How many tons of coal do we use the different months of the year? And have you noticed whether our use of coal follows the average temperature?"

"Edith," I said, "I believe when we first got the new furnace your father figured out how many tons we used. We use what we need to."

"How much does the kitchen range use?"

Seraphy had come out with a pitcher of lemonade.

"There, ma'am!" she cried. "There, ma'am, you see for yourself. 'How much coal does the kitchen range burn?' says she. I tell you, Edith, I use less coal thin any other gurl for the same kind o' big range, thin you'll find in a day's march, an' kin make me fire up to bake pies or tea-biscuits quicker."

"Oh!" cried Edith, with alert interest. "How do you do that, Seraphy? You see," she explained eagerly, "a woman who has discovered any method of efficiency in things as important as a cook-stove ought to know how she does it, so she can teach other people."

"Well, thin, if that's what ye want to know, Edith, I can tell ye," said Seraphy crossly, "about

me kitchen fire, it's a *knack*, one I allus had." At this Edith groaned:

"Oh, no wonder they say all the things about women that they do! No wonder homes are run in the ramshackle way they are, instead of decently like offices!"

"For the land's sakes! what ails ye, Edith?" enquired Seraphy. "An' is it because I tell ye that I've got a knack with the stove that you're grievin'? Many a thing's bin bought for you along with what I saved your ma, 'cause I do be havin' like it was a feelin' in my bones just when the damper needs turnin' on, or the stove does be needin' another spoonful of coal, or was it two spoonfuls, mebbe?"

"I don't suppose you know the difference in cost between the time the house was lighted with kerosene and what it costs now," Edith next enquired. I replied with some tartness:

"Edith, at that time I probably knew, but you and Osborn were babies at the time, and after fifteen years you can hardly expect me to remember." And I realised, as I said this, that I was answering a question that sounded innocent with what, for me, was the same tone that Seraphy had employed. I suppose from the beginning of time grandmothers, and mothers too, have resented being taught how to suck eggs by their juniors.

The next morning, when I asked Seraphy "What groceries do we need to-day?"

"A new skillet," she replied, "as I told ye two days ago, an' since thin Jimmie's bin burnin' a pot out. A skillet an' a new pot's the groceries we needs most this mornin'. Besides, the sugar n'eggs is gone, as you well know, since Edith was a-cookin'. Whatever at all is it has got into her head; snoopin' 'round the kitchen she's bin, an' for no good, the last week. She comes in, an' there she sets a watchin' o' me with owl eyes till the nerves o' me do get jumpin'. 'What is it?' sez I. 'Is it hungry ye are, an' shall I give ye a cruller?' 'No, Seraphy,' sez she, 'crullers bechune meals are bad for the complecshion.' 'An' since whin,' sez I, 'hev you bin thinkin' that eatin' bechune meals—an' me settin' on the cruller-jar day an' night an' hidin' all me pies on ye—was goin' to be roonus to ye?' It's been growin' up she is mighty sudden, that she has bin, an' there's goin' to come an awful unhappy time in this house bechune the time whin Edith is beginnin' to grow up and the time whin she'll be growed. An' that's not the queerest o' her, just settin' around an' glommerin' like a nest o' owls—no, ma'am. 'Tis the strange things she do be askin' me that makes me smell there's somethin' in the air. An' what do ye suppose it was, ma'am, she asks me? Sez

she, 'Seraphy, how many steps is it bechune the sink an' the stove?' 'Steps!' sez I. 'What do ye mean by steps?' 'Steps,' says Edith. 'You know what steps is as well as meself; 'tis whin ye lift one fut an' put it down again. How many steps is it,' sez she again, 'bechune the stove and the kitchen sink?' Sez I, 'I've better things to do than countin' me steps.' Sez Edith, 'There's nuthin' ye could do that'd be of more value to ye, Seraphy, than countin' your steps.' Sez I, 'I can't be wastin' all me time.' Sez she, 'Since I've bin settin' in this kitchen I've niver seen a human being waste time like you done, Seraphy. Your actions is not done efficient.' Sez she, 'What for do ye stan' up and peel your potaties when you set for to shell the peas?' Mis' Preston, if it wasn't that I was with ye since Osborn was born, 'tis not quistions like that I'd be standin' from nobody, an' well do I know, by the token, that Edith's cumin' to that age when all that do be livin' in the house with a gurl do be wishin' that aither she or they was dead."

That afternoon Mrs. Powers called.

"Well," she said, "I suppose you have been pestered to death, just as I have been, with this new-fangled 'Standardised Home.' I don't mind telling them how much it costs to light my house—though I'm not one to talk about my private af-

fairs—but when it comes to my giving an itemised account of how much the shoes of the family cost, for all the high school to gape at, I just put my foot down and told Sylvia that I'm not going to give her my stocking-bills to be pawed by the town. It makes me feel *naked* to have my little economies pried into."

Here I heard a puffing sound outside the door and I knew that Mrs. Baker was waiting there. She is even stouter than my sister Maria, and when she stands at ease before a front door, she pants for a while like a waiting motor-car; but she has a tart tongue for all her placid expanse of pink face.

"Well," was her greeting, "have you got Seraphy still with you, Mrs. Preston, because if you have, you're lucky? My Agnes has left, what with her being made efficient; and she's not the only one. I tell you, when the children were little and an epidemic of measles was going around, I thought life hard to bear; but, mark my words, this epidemic of 'Efficiency in the Home' is going to be worse for us than any contagious disease we've ever had. And when I think I voted for this course! What I thought was going to happen was that they would have a few cooking lessons and some cutting, but Sylvia tells me that's just incidental. The principal thing, it seems, is

for every girl to study her own family as if it were a cage of wild animals and pry into all the household bills and then go blatting up and down Main Street what she's learned."

"While some of it is inconvenient, it seems to me that anything that makes our girls better house-keepers and makes them take a real interest in their homes——"

"Oh," said Mrs. Baker, "this fussing around and sticking their noses in where it doesn't concern them isn't going to make them take care of their rooms one mite better, nor more eager to help with the family stockings, you can believe me. All it has done in my house up to this is to make my good Agnes leave me."

"Yes, and with your trained help, Mrs. Preston," said Mrs. Powers, "perhaps you didn't notice what sorrow was brought to many a family in this town when the girls learned how to serve a home dinner."

CHAPTER XXI

I LAY awake that night, thinking what an excellent idea this was and how much prejudice it had made and how little help I had given Edith and how slack I was about my house anyway, and though I had kept house for twenty years I had no real definite piece of information to contribute to this domestic science. I have always wished girls took more interest in housekeeping, and it seemed to me that this studying "in the field" as Edith told me that evening, what it costs to clothe, feed, light and heat a family, and comparing statistics at school with the idea of forming an average budget, was a good one. But I think, though much can be done in running a house in a more businesslike way, the difficulties Edith encountered will always stand in the way of making such a system an entire success.

"You can run this house," I told Edith next day, "just as you like and make any experiments you choose."

"I've been studying it," she replied. "I've been making a survey of it, the way we all have, for the school. If you'll promise me that they won't laugh at me, I'll prepare a short paper and I'll

read it to them; and that will show them what I want to do." And I felt just a little annoyed when I realised she felt she could standardise a house in a jiffy, over which I had tolerantly misruled so long. Accordingly the next night at supper Edith read aloud the following paper.

Said she: "I expect perfectly well that you all are going to laugh at me, but all pioneers have always been laughed at in the beginning, and if you knew anything about the subject, or had thought about it, you would know I am right. Mother has promised that you would coöperate with me, and now I can give you a better idea by reading what I have written out from the lectures we have been having." With which conciliatory remark she began:

"While all other businesses in the world have been improved and waste of every kind eliminated, the home of to-day remains just what it always was. Instead of having one fine, central, beautiful kitchen, or a few of them in every town, from which food would be economically distributed, a wasteful dirt-and-smell-producing cook-stove impedes the development of our spirits in every household in the land.

"Washday, with its confusion and disturbance, still darkens the lives of innumerable families. Modern life, however, has removed most house-

hold industries from the home, but housewives do not help to remove them. They cling to them. If they wanted to, the wash-tub and the cook-stove could go, along with the spinning-wheel and loom; but they do not wish to. Two things darken the home of to-day; it is the servant problem and the lack of standardisation. ("I don't mean you, Seraphy," she put in.)

"If women had only made a real business of housekeeping, there would not have been any servants left to-day at all. Efficiency means getting things done in the minimum amount of time with the minimum amount of effort consistent with thoroughness; and when you try to save Seraphy's steps by studying how she runs around the kitchen, walking unnecessary miles, she only gets mad. Now, I've been studying this house for several weeks and I want to follow the tendency of the times, which is to have the work done by specialists.

"The work of the house may be roughly divided into three classes: meal preparation, cleaning of clothes and house and personal service. Meals: they've got to keep on just as they are. Cleaning: Nora is leaving Monday anyhow, and we don't need a second girl in the house."

"Well, Edith," said Seraphy, "I'd like to know how ye're goin' to do the work without, with

there bein' six different kinds of company—your pa's, your ma's, your pa's and ma's, your Aunt Maria's and Osborn, and Jimmie and you, each having their own friends and each trackin' up dirt in different ways."

"And how is the waiting going to be done?" said Maria.

"There—you see!" said Edith.

"Go on, Edith," said Henry. "I think this is very interesting."

"All we need a second girl for," replied Edith, "is cleaning anyway. Now wait. The laundry will go out of the house; the windows to be cleaned by a man; the cleaning to be done by a vacuum cleaner; the extra waiting on table, when we have company, to hire Johnson, or get some girl out of work or something. The daily dusting, etc., to be done by Mother, Aunt Maria, Jimmie and me. Personal service there oughtn't to be any ever. By an exact routine being adhered to and a careful study of exact motion required to dust, brush up, etc.,—reducing these motions to a science,—and by running the house systematically as father would his office, half the terrors of house-keeping are eliminated."

Now this scheme pleased Henry. He had read quite a little in the magazines about the dark blot on our national life called "the average home"

and how much it needs standardising and what efficiency could do for it.

“If you could lift the blight of the housemaid from the family, Edith,” he said, “you’d be doing wonderful work. They always scrap with Seraphy, and I’ll be glad to do my part. What’s it to be?”

“Nothing but just wait on yourself, father,” Edith replied, “and pick up your things so as not to make extra work. Half of the work of the home is caused by a childish thoughtlessness.”

At this true observation I smiled to myself.

CHAPTER XXII

WE portioned out the different details of the work: each one of us to do our own rooms, and the downstairs daily dusting to be divided between us. We were all supposed to clear the table off by making a neat pile of our dishes and carrying them into the butler's pantry. This of course Jimmie and Henry both forgot to do, and Edith had to call them back.

"Father," I heard her say, "you've left your paper strewn all over the floor." Henry picked it up in good temper. "And," said she, "everybody ought to remember to take their own things and put them in the dirty clothes; father left his towels thrown on the bathroom floor."

I have always picked up after Henry, nor do I mind doing it, but since he was so clamorous for efficient management and offered so valiantly to do his share, I thought I would let him. So I said:

"Henry, you left your shirt and collars about, and the trousers you want pressed I just saw on the floor."

"Confound it!" said Henry, "I'll be late to the office!"

"You should have gotten up earlier, father. Ten minutes earlier rising on the part of all the family gives a total of sixty minutes, or an hour, to be spent upon the home."

I did not hear what Henry replied, but I did not like the sound of the growl I caught as he dashed upstairs. Edith was waiting at the foot as he came down.

"Papa," she said.

"What is it now?" he demanded.

"Simply that the maid has done the trouser-pressing for all of you, and that's one of the industries I'm going to remove from the home. This is not a tailor shop, so if you will just stop in at the tailor's and ask them to come for your things——"

"I don't pass by the tailor's," said Henry shortly.

"Then telephone from the office," said Edith. "Each person has got to take care of his own clothes."

Presently, when I was dusting the dining-room, I heard Edith instructing Seraphy, and Seraphy saying, as she washed the dishes:

"Yes, I kin believe you, Edie, if I wuz to go one-two-three, one-two-three, mebbe I could wash me dishes faster than I do; but what for should I wash thim faster'n I do?"

"You'd soon get so you wouldn't notice what you were doing," said Edith. "You'd do it mechanically."

"An' what for," enquired Seraphy, "should I want to be doin' me work like a machine? It's doin' it now a bit one way and now a bit tother that do lighten the day. Go on wid ye! I gotta be beatin' up a cake an' bakin' some pies, for Osborn's goin' to have company over Sunday."

"He is?" said Edith. "He didn't tell me."

"Run along now, an' go an' standardise Mis' Maria," advised Seraphy.

"He's just got to make their extra beds himself, then," declared Edith, "because I've got to go to practise for the commencement singing, and I'm just full for over Saturday and Sunday. I always am."

"An' what with my waitin' on the table for all o' ye, you'll have to give me a hand too, Edie, with the dishes, or I'll niver get through all the cookin' that there'll be goin' on in this house."

"I've got to go out and find the window-cleaning man," said Edith. "The windows have got to be cleaned right away. I can't see through the one in my room."

Meanwhile Seraphy went around mourning:

"Ah, that I should see the day! Efficiency is it, an' all the nice clothes of us rotted to pieces

with the acids an' all they do put in the water, an' everything torn and messed."

The atmosphere of the rest of the house was far from peaceful, because it is not easy to make men do the small services to which they are not accustomed, and which have no real relation to their other work in life. There was constant discussion as to who should do various things that turned up, like waiting on the door; and Edith was always reproving Henry, Osborn and Jimmie for leaving things around.

Meanwhile Edith had found just how many minutes ought to do the drawing-room, and how long it ought to take to dust each piece of furniture, and at just what time we ought to be all through work. The only difficulty was we never did get through at the time specified, since we were all more interested in something else, and were constantly being called away by the telephone's ringing, or a visit, or something. Meanwhile the feeling began to grow upon me that I was no longer living in my house, that in my home there was something unpliant, bound around by a band of iron rules, and that I lived in a world where all the details of life were very much in the foreground and very hard to accomplish. Conversations like this—which took place one morning at breakfast—were constantly occurring.

Said Edith: "You're going, aren't you, to the dance this evening, Osborn?"

"Sure," Osborn replied casually.

"Did you have the tailor come for your clothes?" said Edith, who was very punctilious in regard to the men doing their part. Part of the theory is that, since the freedom from the cares of the home will mean the economic independence of women, men should be trained to do things for themselves.

"Gee," said Osborn, "I forgot!"

"Well, see to it, won't you?"

"I haven't got a minute's time, Ede."

"Then you'll have to go with your clothes as they are," responded Edith.

"Well, I won't go at all," retorted Osborn. "You get my clothes pressed for me and see that I have a new tie, or else I won't go. See! Take it or leave it." In this brutal way did the male creature assert his authority.

Upon this Edith bounded to the telephone. I heard her saying in a young excited voice:

"What? You can't do them to-day? You *must!* . . . If I'll bring them around myself? . . . Haven't you any one to send? . . . Well, all right, I'll have to if I have to, I suppose."

And presently I saw her coming down with Osborn's things for Seraphy to wrap up. Seraphy,

now at the breakfast dishes, responded sarcastically:

"Oh, no you don't, Edie! This is a standardised house. I'm workin' on a skejule and go on strike if interrupted while doin' the dishes in the shortest possible time. One-two-three, Edie, one-two-three. Each one should wait for themselves. How do I know where the wrappin'-paper an' string is? One thing I can tell you is, I ain't settin' on neither o' thim. You started this game, Edie; each one for himself and the devil catch the hindmost, an' 'tis ye that's the hindmost."

Here Henry sauntered out and remarked to Edith:

"I'm bringing home a couple of friends to-night for supper. You'd better get some one to wait on table."

"Oh, dear," said Edith, "there's so much to do!"

"If there's to be company to-night you'll have thin to see about the wash. I told your ma long ago the good linens were getting low in the house, and the good napkins are all used up, an' the close is late, as always it is. You'll have to go and git them napkins off'n her if your pa's goin' to have company."

"I don't know how I'm going to get all the things done. I've got to take Osborn's things

back and forth from the tailor's: I've got to go down to the Gussetts to find out what's the matter with them, why they didn't come to clean the house. They were due days ago."

Maria, who had heard none of the conversation, now sailed in with the announcement:

"Edith, will you see that there is tea for me this afternoon? The music committee meets here after the lecture, or I would see to the tea myself."

"You see, father! I've got to have my own commencement frock fitted, and how am I going to find some one to wait on the table to-night?"

"Well," said Henry, "don't cry, Edith. I'll have them another night, or take them out to the club, or something. I think that would be best."

This put Seraphy in fine spirits.

"You've standardised your pa out of the house, haven't ye, Edith?" she remarked.

Edith finally got her package tied, cut the string with the carving-knife, and started. Seraphy called after her derisively:

"Me string an' paper's on the kitchen floor, an' if ye'd grind up me best carving-knife a bit an' put it in the drawer, Edith——" But Edith had fled.

Later in the morning I heard the front door-bell ring and Maria going to open it. Edith had some schedule of turns for doing this that led to

considerable wrangling. Later Maria appeared before me with a face of concentrated gloom.

"Come and see," said she, "what efficiency leads to! It was Mrs. Doble and Berenice who were here on an errand about some church work—and if your're pleased to think that they've gone away with the impression we live in a pig-pen—" As though to the ruins of Carthage Maria pointed.

The double drawing-rooms were untouched from the night before, and the table in the back parlour was littered with games. Jimmie had been playing solitaire on the floor and had left his cards behind him. There were cigar-ashes in an ash-tray, the music was scattered on the piano, and some of it had fallen to the floor, the flowers had let their petals fall desolately, a mantle of dust was over all. On one table stood a tray with sticky lemonade-glasses—there had been several young people in the night before. Over everything was the desolation that seems peculiar to drawing-rooms that have not been attended to. Maria gave time for me to soak it in.

"It was *Edith's* morning in the parlours," she commented. She waited another space of time for this also to sink in. "I could scarcely explain to Mrs. Doble that we were trying '*efficiency in the home.*' "

At this moment Edith came back from her errands.

"We've had callers," her aunt remarked darkly. "Mrs. Doble and Berenice," she supplemented. Edith looked around the room and exclaimed with anger:

"Look at Jimmie's cards, and Osborn should have carried away those lemonade-glasses." Jimmie happened to come through just then, and she called to him: "Now see just a few of the things you've left around. If they were picked up it wouldn't have looked so. I don't say," she conceded, "that I shouldn't have done the parlour before going out, but who would suppose you'd have such early callers!"

"Oh, punk!" said Jimmie. "This is the bum-mest time I ever had."

"I'll bet you haven't even done your bed," said his sister. With surly footsteps Jimmie started upstairs.

"I wish I lived in a tree," I heard him muttering.

"Without clothes!" Edith shot at him.

"Yes, without clothes," said Jimmie.

"And let me tell you, Jimmie Preston," called Edith, "I don't want you and those other kids whooping around and tracking dirt over this house. You keep out of here."

"Why, Edith," said Maria, taking Jimmie's part unexpectedly, "this house is as much your brother's as yours."

"But I don't drop things—marbles and ball-bats and a trail of peanut-shells and greasy door-knobs—behind me wherever I go. How am I going to keep this house clean and decent if Jimmie's going cavorting through?"

That day at lunch Henry announced that he had made arrangements to take his friends to the club that night, and Seraphy informed me later:

"I'll be lookin' after Mis' Maria's tea, ma'am. I'll squeeze in a minute for it, 'cause Edith will be so busy standardisin' an' efficiencyin' that she won't have a minute to think o' it, an' belike she's forgotten it, an' oh, worrah the day, Mis Preston, when this house can't turn out two bites for the master of it, an' that Mr. Preston has to take his friends to a club!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THAT afternoon I heard the sound unmistakable to a mother's ear—several boys of thirteen trying to steal quietly through her house. They were about as inaudible as a troop of elephants. I heard Jimmie trying the door of the attic, but it was locked. I heard low grumblings and the boys going away again.

That evening supper was a gloomy meal: Edith was tired, Henry was away, Osborn was late and Edith scolded Jimmie.

“If you have to bring all the ragamuffins in the neighbourhood in, at least make them wipe their feet. I can follow you like Hop o’ my Thumb by the great tracks of dirt you leave behind you off your grubby shoes and by the finger-marks on the paint: and I’ve had to wipe the paint off because Mary Gussett didn’t come,” pursued Edith in an aggrieved tone.

I will not tell all the details of the times when Mary Gussett, the cleaning-woman, didn’t come at all, and we had to get the expensive house-cleaning man, the quarrels about counting clothes with Maria, or the missing laundry pieces, for these were a daily occurrence; nor the stern elimi-

nations of Jimmie and his friends. For the next ten days life was varied with these things, until one day I heard Edith saying to her father:

"Father, have you got to have your supper at the house?" Henry belongs to a little supper-and-card club of men meeting once in so often at each other's houses.

"Indeed I have," replied Henry. "What's the matter now? Why shouldn't I?" he asked aggressively. He had been extremely good-natured about most of the inconveniences he had suffered, and had stood Edith's nagging as I had not believed he would. A wife often does not learn of what patient stuff her husband is made until her daughters begin to grow up and then she wishes she had been in possession of this knowledge sooner.

"Well, I can't get any one to wait on table for you," said Edith. "Besides that, there's an awful, awful lot of things to be done. It's window-cleaning day and the house won't be in order because Mary Gussett doesn't come until day after to-morrow."

"Edith," said her father, "I would like to ask you one question: Is this a home or an institution? Is this house a place we live in or a place we live for? Eh, Jimmie, what do you say?"

"I don't say," said Jimmie gloomily. "I don't

care how this house is run. It isn't anything to me." He got off at a safe distance and then yelled back with defiant bravado: "Edith can be as efficient as she wants to! I don't care any more!"

"Why, what ails that boy?" said Henry.

That evening Henry and I were sitting up rather late; the children had gone to bed when Seraphy appeared before us.

"Hush!" said she, "an' was it wantin' to know what ailed Jimmie I heard ye askin', Mr. Preston? I'll tell ye what I found." She whisked out from behind her back a package: it was a large bandana handkerchief bought new for the occasion. This contained a pair of stockings, a baseball, a novel of the Nick Carter series—that I did not know had ever entered the house—a knife, some provisions, an extra undershirt, a photograph of me, and various other things.

"It's noticin' this I was in Jimmie's room after doin' it to-day, an' I went in quiet and smooched it out. He's got the alarrum-clock under his pillow, an' has it fixed for one; but he won't be hearin' it becuz I have it downstairs. 'Tis goin' to be runnin' away he is, an' I can tell you he ain't the only man who'll be leavin' home if efficiency gets hold of things. An' 'twas ye, Mis' Preston, who was shenanigan around with, 'No, your pants

can't be pressed to home,' an' 'Help yourself to the flats for to straighten your ties,' and 'Keep to the skejule if you want your meals,' an' 'Pick up your pants, Pa,' it isn't Mr. Preston himself would 'a' been so smilin'-faced."

Here I heard quiet feet sliding down the stair, and got a glimpse of Jimmie's white face, and as he saw the bandana and its contents on the table he dashed into the room.

"Well," he cried, "you've found me out, an' I don't care—I'm going! I'm agoin' away. If I don't have my things I'll go off another time. I'm tired of being told to get off the earth. Mother was always bad enough about 'Don't do this,' and Aunt Maria snorting, and Seraphy shevying me out o' the kitchen, and most anything that was any fun at all being told not to do, but Edith won't let you *live!*"

Just in time to catch these last words, Edith, in her wrapper, entered the room.

"I heard all this racket so late at night and came down to see what it was." She looked at Jimmie and the little telltale package. Her father said to her gently:

"Edith, you can standardise some things, but you can't standardise Jimmie. And I'm afraid you can't standardise me either, just yet, nor most any man. That's just one of the reasons you can't

run a home like an office. Your theories are very good; they just happen to clash with the needs of the people who live in your house."

"Yes, Edith, an' if it wus any other girl but me, she would've left here long since, an' then where would you be standardisin' off to? Out to a resterunt," put in Seraphy.

"So I think," said Henry, "you might as well go back to your mother's shiftless, old-fashioned ways, don't you?"

Edith sat down in a chair and gave a long sigh.

"Oh," she said, "I shall be so glad to have mother take this complicated, horrible old machine of a house off my hands! I don't want to run a house on a business basis. I don't care about the modern trend of things. I don't care about a house anyway: I want to be primitive. I've joined the camp-fire girls, and I was going to give up housekeeping just as soon as mother had had a little rest."

Here Jimmie plumped down awkwardly in my lap. Night-time and night-clothes sometimes, for a brief moment, make a little boy of him again. He threw his arms around my neck and nuzzled his head down on my shoulder.

"Well, if *she's* out of it," he whispered, "I won't leave you just yet."

CHAPTER XXIV

IT often seems to me that girls in the second year in the high school have less of that quality called heart than any one else in the world. Edith alone in the family was not touched by Jimmie's attempt at running away.

She is at the age when she is capable even of inflicting pain remorselessly, for Edith knew perfectly well what she was doing when she remarked to her Aunt Maria at the dinner-table:

"Mary and Bess Haines and I passed right by you on the street to-day, and I bowed like a stranger and said, 'How do you do, Miss Osborn?' and you put on a society manner, Aunt Maria, and said, 'Why, how do you do?' " Here Edith mimicked her aunt's society manner.

At this tale poor Maria flushed guiltily.

"Edith," said I, "how are the Camp Fire girls getting along?"

"Oh, very well," said Edith. "And it isn't the first time you have done it either, Aunt Maria," she returned to the attack. "You know, mother, Mrs. Haines is an awfully mean kind of woman and a real trial to her daughters. She said to Bess: 'Miss Maria Osborn is the snippiest woman

I ever knew. She doesn't even try to recognise her acquaintances on the street. One day she bows to them so politely and the next day, she doesn't even notice them,' and I said to her, 'I wish you'd tell your mother it isn't because my Aunt Maria's proud, it's because'——" Here Seraphy broke in.

"Say, Edith, did you see the note I left upstairs on your dresser that one of your beaux was leavin' for ye?"

"No," said Edith, "where is it?" And she darted off.

Supper was soon over and I stayed behind at a look from Seraphy. What she had to say to me was:

"Ain't it mean of Edith, now, to go teasin' her Aunt M'ria so? You know and I know, Mis' Preston, what ails Miss M'ria. Yes and so does Edith. It ain't poor Miss M'ria's fault if she is gettin' nearsighted and don't like to own up to it. There's more'n her who don't like to own up to things like that. Soon enough she'll have to have some, even if she didn't have to have glasses this many a year, like you had to, Mis' Preston, and you that much younger'n Miss M'ria. 'Tis heartless Edith is to be a-treadin' on her aunt's toes by pointin' to her nearsighted eyes!"

Maria has a few innocent vanities. She is very

proud of her unusually good complexion and she has always taken pains to point out how odd it is that I should have had to have glasses to read for so long when she is my senior. Many and many a woman, and man, too, for that matter, has gone through this. Many a woman has preferred to have the reputation of being a capricious and discourteous person, rather than admit that the failings of middle age were coming over her apace. Many a woman has shut herself away from the family circle to read rather than wear glasses in public. It is only those who have begun to feel the chill touch of middle age who will appreciate the pathos of this.

Seraphy's soft heart had been touched by Maria's predicament, but it was less touched by it the following day. From my own room I could hear Maria's voice saying:

"It *isn't* in the room, Seraphy, anywhere, and it was you did my room this morning, you remember."

"Well, then, Miss M'ria, if I did your room 'twas yerself that asked me to do it. Wasn't ye goin' out early to the committee meetin', and didn't I leave me bakin' to run up and do your room on account of yer not wantin' Nora to be touchin' nothin' in it? Not that I blame ye for not wanting a do-less girl like that to be fussin'

around, but take a book out o' yer room I didn't, nor touch yer embroidery I ain't! And if I *was* touchin' yer books 'twas to put them in the book-case."

"I've looked all through the books," snapped Maria defiantly.

"Ah, ha!" cried Seraphy, "Was it 'In Chune wit' the Infinite' ye was lookin' for, Miss M'ria? An' 'Life an' New Thought,' an' 'The Sick Soul Made Well'? Here they is; all three of them!"

"Where?" demanded Maria with some asperity.

"In the bookcase," Seraphy returned dryly; "on the lower shelf in the shadder."

But even now Seraphy was too kind-hearted to mention to Maria why it was that she had not found the books. But she complained to me afterward:

"What this house'll be if Miss M'ria don't get specs, I dunno. *She* knows why 'tis she can't find things, an' it's mad at me she does be gettin' an' jawin' an' pickin' like she never done. An' if 'twas only me! 'Tis many a year I've been used to Miss M'ria's jawin', but that there silly Nora, she won't stand fer Miss M'ria. She won't take from Miss M'ria what I'll be taking."

"Indeed she won't, mother," said Edith, who was sitting in my room sewing, "and I don't care

a bit if you did glare at me when I spoke of passing her on the street. I don't see the use of being so delicate to people if they are fools, even if they are your aunt."

"No," said Henry, who had come home in time for a cup of tea, "What's the use of pampering Maria? Why you don't say to her openly, 'Maria, you ought to go and get some glasses,' I don't see."

"No, I suppose you don't, Henry," said I, "because it takes a woman to be kind to another woman's foibles."

"But why be kind to her foibles?" Henry persisted. "If Maria is going to have to wear glasses, glasses she'll have to wear, but better sooner than later."

I tried to explain to Henry what that little margin of difference meant to a woman, but he went on:

"I suppose if a person were deaf and fool enough not to want people to raise their voices in speaking to them——" His speech was interrupted by an awful shriek from Maria.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" in an ever-increasing note of alarm. "Oh, gracious! *what* is it, Jimmie!" And I heard Jimmie say:

"Why, what's the matter, Aunt Maria? Don't you know Piker? Piker won't hurt you."

Of course, by that time we were all out in the hall. There was Maria leaning against the wall, quivering and quaking, her hand to her heart, and saying, "Oh, dear!" while Jimmie was sending Piker downstairs.

"What ails you, Maria?" "What is the matter, Auntie!" Edith and I chorused together.

"Oh, dear," Maria moaned. "Piker looked so strange I thought he was some sort of an *animal* coming up the stairs. Oh, dear, oh, dear! you can think what a start it would give you, Editha, if you were just going downstairs and a strange, furry animal seemed to drift by you in the dusk of the hall."

"*Drift!*" exclaimed Jimmie. "Piker?"

And indeed Piker, who was now slowly pacing down the stairs, his tail at half-mast, moves about with the animation of a young buffalo calf.

"Oh, it didn't look like Piker at all," Maria groaned. "It gave me such a start! It was something horrible!"

"Well, Aunt Maria," Edith asked, "what sort of an animal did you suppose walked past you in the hall?"

"Oh, that's just it. I didn't know *what* kind; if I had known what kind it was—! You're not

so afraid when you know, but when you don't know what kind it is, oh, dear, it gives you a terrible start, brushing past you in the dusk, Editha!"

"Well, I think, Maria—" began Henry, and here I pinched his arm and I pinched Edith just as she was about to open her mouth; for if the painful subject of Maria's growing nearsightedness was to be discussed, I chose that it was not to be drawn out in this cold-blooded way in public when Maria was all upset, too.

Next morning at breakfast Maria remarked to Jimmie:

"How restless Piker was all last night!" Maria's room and Jimmie's are just opposite each other. "I was so upset, Editha, yesterday, that I could hardly sleep all night. I had palpitations. My heart would go like this." Maria illustrated the beating of her heart by thumping with her fist on the table several times. "And then it would miss two or three beats and go on just like this again. What with that and the singing of blood in my ears—" she spoke querulously as though it were some one else's fault than her own, "and toward light there was the strangest thumping and bouncing noise which, of course, was the Piker dog. What was he doing, Jimmie?"

"Jumping," said Jimmie.

"Jumping!" cried Maria, "and, pray, why

should he jump at four o'clock in the morning?"

"Can't a fellow teach his own dog to jump if he wants to?" Jimmie responded.

"Editha," Maria now announced, "this is a question in which I will not meddle. I have always maintained that dogs should be kept in their proper place, and if you think a proper place for a dog is your son's bed and a proper time for him to train it into foolish circus tricks, which it won't learn anyway, is at four o'clock in the morning, well and good! I expect to meet my death stumbling over Piker lying right in the way, stretched out as he always does, in the dark part of the hall—if I'm not frightened to death by him growling and passing me like a wild creature——"

"Well, Maria," said Henry, "nothing about Piker pleases you. You make a fuss when you have a chance to get rid of him and you make a fuss when he's home! But, Son, you'd better train him out in the barn instead of in the early morning."

"Yes, sir," said Jimmie obediently.

Later in the day Maria said to me: "Editha, that noise I heard last night is something else. It may be something wrong with the plumbing. You know water often makes a strange noise when something's wrong with the plumbing. I heard the very same sound coming from Jimmie's room-

apparently, though I don't always locate sounds correctly. Even when Piker was in the room with me I heard it; and I do think queer sounds in the night are awfully nerve-racking. I do wish you'd see to it."

When I told this to Henry, he said: "Editha, there are moments when Maria gets on my nerves. Eye-strain is what ails *her!* I've heard that eye-strain would lead to the most complicated nervous symptoms. If there are any more queer noises in the house, fainting spells because Piker walks by, rows with the servants because she can't see where her things are, *I shall lead her to the oculist in spite of anything you may say.*"

CHAPTER XXV

THE next Sunday Edith and Henry and I went with Osborn to Amersville, where he was to go to college in the fall. When we returned Maria wasn't downstairs; the house was gloomy. I discovered Jimmie still reading in the dining-room, and Henry began:

"Why on earth aren't you in bed, Jimmie? Can't we ever go out anywhere without you acting like this?"

And I asked: "Where's Maria?"

"Don't ask me," responded Jimmie sourly.

"Oh! isn't home an awful place!" groaned Edith. "Here we go out and have a nice time all day and as soon as we get home everybody begins to scold."

"Well, you always make things pleasant, don't you?" said Jimmie sarcastically.

"That'll do," interposed Henry. "Go to bed, Jimmie."

I went upstairs ahead, however, looking for Maria. She was sitting in a very gloomy light in her own room.

"Why, Maria, why do you sit in this gloomy way in the dark?"

“What difference does it make if I sit in the light or in the dark?” she replied.

“Why, what do you mean?” said I. “What is the matter?”

“Nothing, Editha,” said Maria. “What should be the matter with me?”

I turned the light up. Maria looked pale and drawn which for a woman as stout as Maria means a great deal of emotion. I said:

“Why, Maria, do tell me what is the matter.”

“Nothing,” she replied in a hollow voice. “Don’t plague me so, Editha. I suppose I may have a mood; all the rest of the family have them.” This sounded more like her, so I kissed her and went to bed.

During the first days of the week Maria’s gloom persisted, and I noticed that she watched Piker suspiciously. She talked too of going to Springfield to do some shopping, and I thought the time had come when she was going to consult an oculist, but by Friday or Saturday she was quite herself again.

Next Sunday, much to Maria’s disgust—she doesn’t approve of Sunday journeyings—Henry and Edith and I went off with the Morrises in their car. We got back late in the afternoon, and Maria was standing on the front porch, her face very serious. At sight of her:

"What's Jimmie been doing?" asked Henry.

Ever since last Sunday he had been having a suspicious eye out for Jimmie. Henry is like a good many men in regard to his children. For quite a long time he will leave the management of them to me and to chance. Then suddenly he becomes aware of their many shortcomings and takes the discipline of the home upon himself, for a while. Then, after a reign of terror, things go on as before in their comfortable, slack, old way. So, even though Maria was so portentous, I, on my account, was more worried about Henry's suspicious attitude to Jimmie. He had been talking all the week about "Your children," and when he begins talking about "Your son does so-and-so," I know the hour of discipline is at hand. I guessed wrongly this time, for Maria replied solemnly:

"Jimmie has been doing nothing. I wish, Editha," she said, "that you and Henry would step with me into the library for a moment."

We entered the library with her and Maria shut the door.

"I have something very serious to tell you," said she, "but keep calm: don't get excited. I am preserving my calmness and so can you." Her manner was so impressive that I began to feel very uncomfortable. "Sit down, everybody," Maria went on. "I think I'd rather tell you sitting."

We had all three been standing as people will in the presence of unexpected ill news.

"Hurry up, Maria," urged Henry, who was beginning to be a little disturbed, "and tell us whatever it is."

"For some time past," Maria said, "my eyes have—troubled me slightly. Indeed, I have sometimes contemplated going to see an oculist." And at this remark I heard Henry give a little sigh of relief. "I thought I even," Maria pursued, "might have to wear glasses now and then. But it is not nearsightedness, Editha, that ails me! I do not need an oculist. I need to consult a specialist in mental derangement, and I'm going to that psychiatrist, the Reverend Doctor Weede, in the city!"

"Why, Maria?" enquired Henry, deeply concerned.

"Why?" echoed Maria with gloom. "*Why?* Because it isn't the eyes of my body which are affected—it's the eyes of my spirit!"

With that irritation which a man usually feels when alarmed: "Would you kindly mind telling what's the matter with you?" asked Henry.

"I have hallucinations," replied Maria simply.

"Hallucinations! Pooh!" said Henry.

"Hallucinations?" I echoed stupidly. "What do you mean, Maria?"

"I mean just this. I have been seeing strange things and hearing strange noises around this house. Do you remember the day that I screamed so? I believe now that it wasn't the Piker Dog who passed me. I think it was nothing that passed me except a figment of my own distracted brain."

"Nonsense, Maria!" cried Henry.

"Don't say 'nonsense' to me," replied Maria, in the tone of one who is doomed, "but wait till I tell you. This very afternoon I was looking out of the window to the back-yard and Jimmie was beside me and I saw the Piker Dog walking on the clothes-line!" At this picture Henry burst into unfeeling laughter.

"Laugh if you like," said Maria, "but I tell you with *these eyes* I saw *Piker* walking upon the clothes-line, and I exclaimed as any one naturally would exclaim at such a sight, 'Heavens! Jimmie, look at that!'"

"'At what?'" Jimmie answered. Then I perceived that only *my* eyes could see this abnormal sight. He walked clear down the clothes-line and turned around again and walked back on the clothes-line that's just at the level with the top of Seraphy's head. Nor is that all; later in the afternoon when I went out on the piazza to think over what it was that could have happened to me I looked up and again I saw Piker. This time,

Editha, he was climbing briskly up the water-spout! I closed my eyes and I think I must have fainted for a second, for when I opened them there was nothing there. This isn't all. Last Sunday when you were away, and at various other times, Piker has looked strange and queer to me. I undoubtedly have some suppressed emotion connected with the fear of dogs that is now showing itself in this form of hysteria. Only the other night I dreamed of Piker's sitting up on his hind legs, cracking peanuts with his paws."

Maria told this story so seriously and with such grave conviction that Henry looked at her puzzled; it was no laughing matter. But what can you say to a woman who insists that she has seen your mongrel house-dog climbing up the spout and walking the clothes-line?

CHAPTER XXVI

GLOOMY silence fell on all of us, which was broken by the sound of running in the hall. I heard the patter of little feet and then Jimmie running and the shrill voice of Seraphy:

"I don't care what yer say; I shall tell your ma and pa after this. Last Sunday it lapped out the inside of the cranberry and raisin pies in a second while me back was turned, and I had to be lyin' to your ma." (Here Seraphy burst into the room): "An' I had to lie to ye, Mis' Preston, as to what happened to the pies. 'Burnt,' sez I, they wuz, but nary a bit burnt was they. 'Twas the haythen ape that lapped 'em up in a minute. 'An' where is it?' sez Jimmie to me a few moments ago. 'Don't ask me,' sez I. An' somethin' told me that things wuz wrong in me room, an' oh, wurra! if I hadn't left me bureau drawer open when I put me best hat into it comin' home from Mass; and there the baste had made himself a nest, an' was sleepin' as fine as you plase!"

"Beast?" said Henry.

"What beast?" said I.

"'Tisn't me that can tell ye. I never see its likes. A monkey baste," said Seraphy, "that Jim-

mie's been keepin' this three Sundays for a friend of his that's away them days. I promised not to tell on him, but there's a limit to all things. Four feet he has instead of four hands, which don't prevint him pullin' feathers out o' best bonnets wid his toes the same as he had fingers; but he ain't homelike or cunning like any monkey ye ever see, but more like them animals like I saw wunst in the picture of the 'Temptation of St. Anthony the Hermit' in the ould country. An' it's got away this minute. When I gave it a good clout, lickety-split it goes gallopin' down the back hall an' Jimmie after it. Then I hear him agoin' up the back way an' he do be making for the roof, an' Jimmie along after it, the unchancy-lookin' ape it is!" In the midst of this Henry rose to his feet.

"This is too much!" he cried. "I'm going to look after that boy; I don't care how big he is!" By this time Maria was convinced that it was not her eyes which were at fault and at the same moment burst out sobbing.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! I'm so glad! I'm so glad!" and Seraphy began patting her.

"There, there, Miss M'ria, dear. I didn't know it was scared she wuz, like that!"

Just here there was a terrible noise in the middle chimney as of some heavy falling thing. With

one accord we all cried, "Jimmie!" Henry made no remark, but bounded for the attic, while Seraphy, already worked up, began crying:

"It's kilt, is Jimmie! It's fallen off the roof or fallen down the chimney he is!" While Maria cried, "Oh, Jimmie! Jimmie!"

We all three ran out-of-doors. At the sight of Henry on the roof and Maria and Seraphy looking up and lamenting and crying to him from below, neighbours on their way home from afternoon service stopped to enquire what the matter was. I myself said not one word. For a moment it seemed to me as though my power of thought had been blotted out. The whole suspense lasted only a moment, for Eddy Baker sidled up to me in his lumbering bashfulness, and muttered:

"Jimmie ain't fell off the roof. He's beat it by the ell, Mis' Preston, and got down by the apple tree the way he mostly does."

It was news to me, but I suppose all mothers of boys of twelve should make up their minds that their sons have strange ways of getting in and out of the house that they know nothing about. So we went into the house and met Henry coming down the stairs. A glance, of course, had shown him how impossible it would have been for Jimmie to fall down even our large chimney. The

fright had heightened his irritability. I may even say it had aroused his temper and he was angry with himself, too, for scrambling around his own roof on Sunday afternoon.

"Listen to me, Editha," were his words to me, "when I catch that boy I am going to give him a hiding—a good hiding! There comes a point, whether he is as big as a barn or not, when something drastic has to be done. Look how he's acted! Harboursing strange and unclean monkeys in the house, frightening his aunt to death, prevaricating, galloping upon roofs, and now we shall probably have to tear the house half down—" For during this time we became aware of a mighty scratching and clawing up the chimney. Here Maria, who was overcome with relief to think that she was not suffering from hallucinations, said feebly:

"Oh, Henry, don't! Remember, boys will be boys!"

"Boys will be boys, perhaps," barked Henry, "but there is no reason why boys should be devils!"

"Right ye are, Mr. Preston," Seraphy agreed. "I been findin' foot-tracks of the baste in flour all over me back pantry; 'tis a good half barrel of flour is wasted. An' if you had seen him, like

I have, close to, it'd give you a chill to know what's a-clawin' in yer chimbley."

"When I think how he could have killed himself," said Henry savagely, "climbing over that roof! Every bone in his body might be broken this minute and a pretty fix we'd be in! There isn't anything for it, Editha, he's got to be whipped." Just as he uttered these words Jimmie rushed into the hall and fled up the stairs. In one hand he carried a clothes-line to which a brick was attached.

"You young rascal! Where are you going?" Henry shouted in a menacing voice. "Where are you going? Stop!"

"The honey-bear!" gasped Jimmy. "I'm going to get Ned Stratton's honey-bear. It's down the chimney. Come on, Pop," he urged. "Come on up and help me haul him up if we have to."

"Haul him up?" asked Henry.

"On the clothes-line," I heard Jimmie's voice trailing out. "I've tied a brick to the end of it so it'll go straight." He was gone and Henry followed him.

Every day I live I wonder why it is that the feminine nature is the one to be called inconsistent. Henry had been so anxious about Jimmie that it seemed as if he could relieve his feelings in no other way than by beating him. I

suppose there is many a boy who has had a sound spanking for not having broken his leg. Henry certainly mounted the stairs with determination on his mouth. We three women naturally trailed up to the attic after him. Through the skylight I heard Henry's voice, perfectly peaceful and quiet, a note of pride piercing it, saying:

"How did you happen to think of this way of getting him out, Jimmie?"

Jimmie's legs appeared through the skylight. He lifted his arms up to receive a strange looking animal from his father's hands.

"Why, it all came to me in a flash. I don't know. I just didn't think." Henry by this time had got through the skylight himself. "He sat on the chimney," Jimmie went on eagerly, "and somehow fell in and I just didn't wait: I remembered where I had seen a brick lying in the Bakers' yard and just where the clothes-line was. Something just thought for me like I was wound up. He hadn't gone 'Thump!' before I knew I was going to get him out with a clothes-line and a brick. It's queer how things come to you." He was looking up with confidence into his father's face. Henry turned to me, pride in every accent, and said:

"That's what I call presence of mind and real

mechanical instinct!" He patted Jimmie's shoulder approvingly.

The queer, monkey-like creature lay exhausted in Jimmie's arms.

"It's a kind of monkey called the honey-bear," Henry explained. "Jimmie has been keeping it Sundays for a friend. Of course, he should have asked."

"Aw!" grumbled Jimmie, "what's the use of asking when you know what the answer's going to be?"

"Well, Maria," Henry went on in the tone of the complacent male, "now you see your hallucinations. When you can't tell a honey-bear from Piker—" he spoke as though a honey-bear was a usual adjunct to any family, "don't you think it's time you paid a visit to the oculist?"

CHAPTER XXVII

I HAVE often wondered why it is only to young married women that the advice is given, "Take as much pains about your clothes, my dear, after you are married as you did before." It seems to me that married men need such advice far more, for there is something in the nature of man, except in the courting stage, which seems to delight in old clothes.

Henry has always taken a delight in disreputable garments and cannot go out to do an hour or two's work in the garden without dressing up as though to impersonate the scarecrow. In my earlier days I made a few feeble attempts to have Henry give up a few of his worst things, for his pet gardening clothes really do look as if they had been exhumed after having lain in a mildewed cave for many years: but I had given this up long ago. Maria is made of sterner stuff; she never gives up. Periodically she grumbles to me about Henry's clothes.

We were sitting on the piazza with some of the neighbours who had dropped in and mechanically I noticed Henry at work. So evidently did

Maria, for as soon as the callers left, she burst out:

“Editha, something should be done! The moment has arrived for you to bring your influence to bear.”

I very naturally asked: “Why, what do you mean?”

To which Maria replied succinctly: “I mean Henry’s clothes; that’s what I mean. Henry’s gardening clothes are really too ridiculous! I know very well what you will say. You’ll tell me that tiresome old story again about Henry’s being so proud of a man’s stopping here and asking him: ‘Do the folks you work for want to buy a ladder?’ I don’t think it’s a funny story at all. I think a man with a son about to enter college and a daughter almost a young lady, and another son of Jimmie’s age, ought to be more than a father to his children, he should be a *pride* to them. I could have blushed for shame when Mrs. Butler said, ‘How fond your husband seems of gardening.’ I know what she meant! More than that, he’s a bad example for the children. Osborn goes around dressed in a horrible old grey sweater and unpressed trousers. You know the battles which occur hourly, one might say, to make Jimmie change his clothes and keep clean——”

“Henry makes the boys dress for dinner every

night, just as he dresses himself," I protested feebly.

"I don't say Henry isn't *clean*," Maria conceded magnificently, "but when you call what he does 'dressing for dinner,' Editha! All he does is to change from one old suit to another equally old, washing in between. I feel sure that there are more old clothes around here than are good for any house."

I changed the difficult subject by moving away. I had no sooner seated myself in my own room than Edith found me. Said she:

"I'm not going to ask the Davidsons to supper!"

I knew I would have to ask why not sooner or later, so I asked it at once.

"You know as well as I do why not," replied Edith. "You know that whenever we have new company Seraphy isn't content to let Nora wait on table. She must come in and look at them herself. And if she'd put on a proper black dress when she wants to come in! But no, she must come in in those fierce old clothes of hers, looking as though the bog was still sticking to her shoes. I get so ashamed I'd like to sink through the floor. So unless you can get Seraphy to dress nights we have company which she intends to inspect I'm not going to have company! More than that,

Jimmie ought to be wearing collars at night instead of shirt waists. He looks just awful!"

Next morning while I was writing some letters the quiet was broken by Edith wrangling with Seraphy.

"When you was standardising the house, Edie," I heard Seraphy say, "ye'd 'a' standardised any one off the earth that 'd 'a' tried to have a tea-party and six white pique skirts the same week!"

The same day Maria told me: "Thursday afternoon, Editha, I've asked the musical committee of the Club to have tea here. I know I had them last time, but Mrs. Grayson's sick, and with our big house it seemed easier for us to have them twice than anybody else."

"Seraphy won't get anything for you, Aunt Maria," said Edith, the light of battle in her eyes.

"What's the matter with Seraphy?" asked Maria.

"Oh, Seraphy's just cross because I like to be clean," responded Edith. "She'd like us all to dress in things that wouldn't show dirt—horrid thought! But, don't mind, Aunt Maria, I'm having a couple of girls in for tea and I'll make tea for your friends and mine, too, if you'll let me. And I'll get the other things ready. Do you want your friends on the piazza, Aunt Maria, or in the

drawing-room? It doesn't make any difference to me which."

Now these were polite words that it should have pleased a mother's heart to hear. But Edith's unwonted consideration of her aunt gave me pause.

"Really, I think Edith is too nearly a young lady to have Seraphy dictate to her how many times a week she should change her stockings," Maria said.

I joined Maria's tea-party. Thursday afternoons Henry generally arranges to get off early from business, and comes home and fusses a little about the garden. A little after five I thought I heard his step and there, sure enough, he was, silhouetted in the French window of the drawing-room. I could see by the looks on the faces of the ladies that for a moment no one recognised him. He was dressed in his worst gardening clothes. He had on a pair of old and patched knickerbockers; the knee strap of one trouser had got undone and the fulness flapped scarecrow fashion around his leg. No one could have told what colour the coat originally had been. In his hand was a tattered hat. On his feet were weary-looking sneakers.

"I wonder if I'm too disreputable looking to

beg a cup of tea?" he asked in polite society tones.

"Indeed not," rejoined Maria in equally polite society tones, though I knew that she wished that she might sink through the floor. It was only when Henry was fairly seated that I observed that he had a bandana handkerchief tied around his neck instead of a necktie, and that what made it more incongruous was the unconcerned way in which he sipped his tea and discoursed polite conversation as though dressed in conventional afternoon garb. Soon I heard Osborn's voice on the piazza asking for tea, and then Jimmie's voice saying, in the tone which he uses before company when he knows that Edith isn't going to be able to deny him anything:

"Can I have a cup of tea, too, Sister?"

I moved my chair a little bit and I could see that both the boys rivalled their father in their dress. Osborn was just off the ball field, and as Jimmie sat with his back against the light I could only guess where he'd been. But no sooner had the company departed than I learned. Edith dashed in, tears of mortification in her eyes.

"Mother," said she, "you've just got to tell Jimmie Preston to keep away from me when I'm having tea!"

"I've got just as good right to tea made in this

house as you have, Edith," said Jimmie, following hard on her heels. "I'm not goin' to starve just because you're stuck-up!"

"Look at him," cried Edith. "Look at his loathly, disgusting face and hands! Look at his shirt! Look at his pants! That's the way he comes to tea-parties! Fishing; that's where he's been! And he comes and sits right down with the Davidsons, covered with angle-worms and fish scales!"

"Well," said Jimmie, "I didn't know anybody was here but the family when I came in, and I didn't look one bit worse than father."

"There," Maria exclaimed, after Jimmie had gone; "there, you see, Editha, that's the way it goes on! And the boys will always be just like that until something forces Henry to dress better."

"Perhaps you think it's pleasant for me," resumed Edith, "to have father walk across the porch and bow and have the girls say, 'Who's that?' and have to say, 'It's my father.' And, if you wanted to, you could stop it just as easy. I've a plan, if you carry it out, to stop all that!"

"What is it?" I naturally asked.

"I'm not going to tell you," replied Edith. "You're so weak-minded and let everybody trample on you so that you'd give it away. I'm just

going to keep it until I'm exasperated to distraction, which is pretty nearly now." As Edith and her aunt went out of the room, I could hear Maria saying:

"What's your plan, Edith? *I'm* not weak-minded like your mother."

CHAPTER XXVIII

OTHER affairs put all this out of my mind, nor did I in any way connect them with Edith's enquiring so anxiously as to just what day next week I was going to drive over to Riverdale to see an old friend. It is a very long drive and I have to have luncheon early and start out immediately after. When I arrived home rather tired the house seemed to me to be full of suppressed giggling. Maria walked along with so buoyant and gay a step that the house fairly shook, Edith had the cat-with-the-canary expression, and Seraphy's was full of suppressed news. At supper Henry began:

"Editha," he grumbled, "I can't find one pair of my old gardening pants. I've looked and looked."

"Why," I suggested, "sometimes Seraphy washes them for you. They need a thorough boiling every now and then, you know."

"I don't suppose she boils my sneakers or my gardening shoes, or my old pipes that I smoke only in the garden because you and Maria have such fastidious noses, though I daresay that shoes and pipes both would be better for boiling."

Just here Osborn came in. "I say," he said, "I can't find any of my old camping things! The fellows and I were going out to the camp over Sunday. What have you done with them, mother?"

"Some one's been putting things away," said Henry with conviction.

Edith looked at her plate and Maria continued eating her supper with detached unconcern as though the question of old clothes was far removed from her thoughts. Next morning it rained.

"My old raincoat's missing, too," Osborn informed me. "See here, mother, some one's been monkeying with my things! I'm going to the camp to live and I'll take my clothes with me!"

Jimmie came home in a whirl of excitement. I heard Maria saying to him:

"Jimmie, if you're going fishing this horrid day, you've got to change your clothes. That's a new school suit you've got on, and if your mother saw you I know she'd say the same thing."

Presently Seraphy's voice sounded from the front hall:

"Jimmie Preston, wheriver are you a-goin' in yer best Sunday suit? Not a step are ye goin' t' stir out into th' wet wid yer best clothes on."

"Aunt Maria told me to change my clothes."

said Jimmie, "and this was all I could find."

"There, bad luck to th' day!" cried Seraphy. "A joke's a joke an' too much is too much, an' whin I went out for the errands, so's not to know nothin' about it, says I to Miss Maria, 'You'd better be leavin' some o' Jimime's pants, or no good'll come of it.' For Osborn's new ones can do for old, an' Mr. Preston's new ones can do for old, but Jimmie's old ones has got to be old or it'll all come back on poor Mis' Preston. March up an' change yer things straight back ag'in, Jimmie."

Later in the afternoon I heard Osborn and his father rummaging around together and grumbling. They both presented themselves before me, demanding:

"Where are our things? We want to know."

Edith came into the room. "Osborn Preston," she said, "you stop bullying mother! I'm not speaking to you, father, so you needn't flash your eyes at me. If I'd known you were all going to notice all your things were gone at once, Aunt Maria and I wouldn't have sent them together, but just little by little."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Henry.

"I'll tell you what I mean," replied Edith, smiling and cocking her head exasperatingly on one side. "Both you and the Indians are go-

ing to be lots better dressed after this! Lo, the poor Indian is going to have your horrid old garden pants, father, and all your fierce old socks and all your fierce old hats and all your dilapidated raincoats and Jimmie's fish-scale pants. We sent Seraphy uptown when mother was away yesterday and we packed some barrels full of clothes and sent 'em off to the Indians."

Edith looked provokingly pretty and exasperatingly saucy as she said this.

"Now," she went on, "I don't have to be afraid of a father or a brother that looks like a tramp, coming in when I've got company!"

Every wife knows that her husband's sense of humour has queer vanishing points. Henry is always telling me to use my sense of humour, which means his point of view toward life. But his sense of humour stopped at the loss of his cherished old gardening clothes.

Henry was angry. So was Osborn. I need not repeat the things they said, but their combined bad temper had a peculiar effect on me. I had had nothing to do with sending away their old clothes to the Indians, and yet I had to bear the brunt of their ill-humour. I let them fuss and fume and talk about their personal belongings not being tampered with until they were quite through. Then I spoke, and it was not as though

I spoke from reflection. It was as though, quite without my own volition, from the inner places of my being, there came these words; and it was exactly as if I was listening to some one else speak them. Said I:

“I’m going to leave you to have it out with Maria and Edith. Mrs. Baxter has been inviting me for weeks to come and visit her and I’m going! I am going on the afternoon train because I can’t stand the disagreeable ways of this family a moment longer, and there isn’t any reason why I should.”

Dead silence followed this statement. Before they had time to say a word I walked out of the room and found myself packing a suit-case and sending a telegram. Edith meekly followed me into my room and helped me pack.

“I don’t want to stay here alone with those old crosspatches,” she said, “and have them grumble at me. Why can’t I spend Sunday at Aunt Lizzie’s? She’s always wanting me to come. Let me beat it with you, mother. Then they can snarley-yow at Aunt Maria all they want to. I think men are fierce, anyway.”

When Maria learned that we were going:

“If you think that I’m going to bear the brunt of this, Editha,” said she, “you’re mistaken. I shall go to Sister Lizzie with Edith. Then the

boys and Henry can sorrow over their lost pants together if they want to.”

It was then that my sense of humour returned to me and I sat down and laughed.

CHAPTER XXIX

WE were all three home again Monday before luncheon. Maria and I had barely finished unpacking our things when Seraphy joined us.

“Whisht!” she said. “’Tisn’t tellin’ on thim I’d be after, if ’twasn’t that they’d been sneakin’ me two wash wrappers on me, an’ me havin’ to be trapsin’ to th’ store an’ buyin’ another wid me own money. An’ by the same token, me oldest slippers an’ me second best bonnet, th’ one with th’ red poppies on it, has gone the same road. Yis, Miss Maria, gone th’ same road that your switch that don’t match your hair an’ your old dolman is gone! Whin I heard Jimmie a-sayin’ at th’ supper table that night—an’ Mr. Preston an’ Osborn wid faces on thim as long as mules—whin I heard Jimmie a-sayin’, ‘Pa, there’s more than Indians need clothes,’ ’twas then I opened me eye an’ pricked up me ear. An’ could ye a-heard the haw-haws an’ the laughin’, Mis’ Preston, you’d a-been prickin’ up yer own, though perhaps not close to the keyhole like I done. But ’twas upon His own desk I found th’ list of it,

writ in His own writin' wid His own fountain pen. Yes, Mis' Preston, th' three of thim made a list of all your clothes and all Miss Maria's an' all o' Edith's that they don't like, an' bust their sides while they done it. Edith's high-heeled shoes is gone, an' her new corsets. So is her red silk stockin's an' her powder. Ye needn't glommer so, Edith—in yer bureau drawer where some of thim was is pasted a big label, 'STRIVE TO BE SIMPLE.' It's hoppin' ye'll be whin ye see it. An' like I said, Miss Maria's switch is gone, an' her dolman. Her wine-coloured silk wid th' fringe, too. Don't take on so, Miss Maria. Mr. Preston says he'll buy you anything ye want, though I don't think they should have tuck yer big shell brooch, so I don't. An' every hat you've got, Mis' Preston, but th' one ye've got on yer head, *isn't here*. And yer old tailor-suit, ye won't see that no more, an' most everything second best ye got; an' ye ain't got a ribbon left, because, says He, He's sick o' seein' pressed ribbons on ye. An' I forgot to say Edith's suit wid th' awful tight-fittin' skirt, they got that, too. Twill cost an awful lot to get things like they was before, but they talked it all up an' Mr. Preston says—glory be, the keyhole's so large—'tis worth it if there has to be a mortgage stuck on th' house. An' mebbe I'm mean to be telling of ye all, but I'd

thank him to leave me second best bonnet wid the poppies."

Maria sat speechless. Edith had two bright red spots in her cheeks. I managed to gasp out:

"Where have the things gone, Seraphy?"

"'Tis th' Salvation Army got 'em," said Seraphy, "an' tickled they was at the idea. "'Tis praisin' God better th' poor will be,' says Osborn, 'along o' these things.' Says Mr. Preston, 'Not one o' the things, from Maria's dolman to Edith's high-heel shoes, has made me praise God none except th' day that I see th' last o' them.'"

Here Edith blazed out:

"I think they're mean! I think they're horrid mean and vindictive, taking the things that they knew all of us like and cherish in some way."

While Maria mourned: "It's all very well talking of putting a mortgage on the house, but where will I find cut jet to-day like that on my old dolman? And fringe! it may not be the style, but I like it. I had associations with that dress."

"Well," said Edith, "there's just one thing we needn't do! We needn't make a spectacle of ourselves the way father and Osborn did. We'll ignore them. We won't show them by word or sign that we know anything has happened at all. Except I know what I shall do. I shall go and

get whatever clothes I need and I shall send father the bill!"

We agreed on a policy of silence. We ignored Jimmie's sniggerings and Henry's quizzical look and Osborn's pointed questions. We acted as if our most cherished economies and cherished extravagances had not been picked out of our wardrobe like plums out of a cake.

Whenever we were alone together Maria lamented her dolman with the cut jet and would mourn: "Oh, if I could have my switch back again and my shell pin. I shall never feel the same without that pin." At last, stung to exasperation, I replied: "Well, Maria, you know perfectly well that switch *didn't* match."

To which she answered pathetically: "It's not my fault, Editha, that my hair has changed colour with years. It always made me feel younger to put on that switch, made out of my own combings."

Something about her tone touched me deeply. I don't think men ever realise how pathetic women like Maria are. And perhaps it's not only women like Maria who are pathetic.

After a few days the whole affair seemed to be forgotten except for Maria's sorrowing. One afternoon she came home and I knew by the way she walked up the garden path she was going to

make straight for my room. She came in, shut the door, opened it again to see if any one was listening in the hall and then said mysteriously:

"Editha, I have found out an extraordinary thing! There is some hocus-pocus afloat. When I went uptown to-day I saw that old coloured Lucy Anderson wearing—and at one and the same time, mind you—Seraphy's bonnet with the poppies, your second tailor-suit and *my* shell brooch! When I saw them on her I will say that I thought your clothes and Seraphy's were very well where they were, but I want my shell brooch back. Now, how do you think they came there? Edith," she called, opening the door, "come in here. I want to speak to you."

She told Edith of her discovery.

"Now, what do you think?"

All of us said one word—"Jimmie!"

"That wretched boy," cried Maria, "never sent a thing to the Salvation Army. *Selling them is what he's doing.*"

"He's been gone until late every afternoon," said Edith, "and I saw him and one of the Blaney boys trundling along a large hand cart."

"Peddling is what he's been!" said Maria. "Peddling his mother's clothes and his sister's and his aunt's, snatched off their backs, around the streets!"

"Well," said Edith superbly, "he can have them. Let him do it. Let him act ridiculous if he wants to. I wouldn't put on a rag that he's hawked around. I wouldn't wear a thing that they've taken away—not even to spite them! I wouldn't notice them that much!"

A look of avidity had come into Maria's face. "I want my things!" said she.

"Oh, Aunt Maria!" cried Edith, "you're not going to give them that satisfaction, after all we've been through."

Maria sat down in a chair and began fanning herself. She and Edith stared at each other.

A family like ours is always forming itself in little groups. Now it will be Henry and me against the invading forces of the children; again Jimmie and Osborn waging war against Maria and Edith, while Henry and I severely keep the part of non-combatants, and Seraphy acts as the boys' reinforcements. I don't think I remembered before a quarrel where all the members of the family had been engaged. One would suppose that we had been definitely routed, since the men had told us in no uncertain fashion what they thought of our foibles, and it had seemed in the last analysis that Jimmie sat triumphantly on the top of the ruin of our wardrobes, turning to us a derisive countenance.

I sat alone in my room and I considered: One thing was certain; this selling of our clothes must be stopped at once. Then I reflected further that since I was to part with some of my things why shouldn't I have the pleasure of giving them to whom I wished? As I passed Edith's room to go downstairs to wait for Jimmie to come home—it had come to that—I saw Edith, her face in her hands, her elbows on her knees, deeply sunk in thought.

"Now," I thought, "it only remains for Maria to come to me and tell me to 'take steps.'" But I determined to get the first chance at Jimmie. A little later I heard Maria walking around and it seemed to me that she shook her room triumphantly as she walked. Presently I heard Jimmie's whistle. When I glanced at him I wondered if I was too late; the old-clothes business must have been a thriving one, for Jimmie was dressed in new baseball clothes.

"Jimmie," I said, "I want to speak to you."

"Talk to Aunt Maria," he muttered.

Here Edith came in the door and smiled commandingly:

"Jimmie, come up to my room. I've got something I want to say to you."

"Say it to Aunt Maria," he repeated in more assured tones.

I heard Maria creaking down the stairs. She sailed into the room with the dignity of a ship under full sail and looked calmly around on the family. She was dressed in her wine-coloured silk with fringe. Over her arm was the dolman with the cut jet and her hair was dressed with the switch that didn't match. The shell pin was at her neck.

"There is no use asking Jimmie for the other things," she said. "They have all gone to the Salvation Army, where they belonged. I did not intend to have our things hawked around, so I took steps at once, Editha, knowing it was useless to wait for you."

For once Jimmie and Maria, hand in hand, stood victorious in the face of the entire family.

CHAPTER XXX

THE truce between Jimmie and Maria did not last long. I knew it was over the day Maria remarked to me:

"You know, Editha, what my ideas of the duties of a mother are; she should have the wisdom of the serpent and the eyes of the peacock and if *I* were Henry's wife I should feel it my duty to find out why his youngest son climbs into the loft of the barn by the wistaria-vine, instead of going up to it by the proper staircase. It's bad both for his trousers and the vines; and I say when a boy begins shinning up things to get somewhere that's led to by a proper staircase, it's time to see what he's doing up there."

"Thank you, Maria," said I as meekly as I could. "It's kind of you to tell me this——"

Here Jimmie came on the piazza to inform me:

"If I come in very late some night, don't you be worried. I shall be perfectly safe."

"I'm sure you would," I replied cheerfully. "Much safer than after you got home if your father happened to notice you were away." For

Henry will not have the children out evenings without his knowing where they are.

“Don’t let him ask me, though, where I was,” continued Jimmie. “I couldn’t tell him.” I went on sewing. “I’m under a bond of blood not to tell. If any feller in this neighbourhood disappears,” Jimmie went on, “and is never heard from again, it’ll be no use searching for his body. There won’t be a body. It’ll be ’cause he’ll have squealed, and any one who squeals any of the least secrets of the B.B.O.I.C. will just vanish from the surface of the earth—just vanish! He won’t never be heard from again.” Jimmie set his lips firmly. “You won’t ask me any questions about it, will you, mother? Because, you see, I can’t tell you anything.”

“No,” I said, “I won’t ask a question.”

He didn’t seem as grateful as he should have. Later he tried piquing Edith’s curiosity, but he was as little successful as with me. Edith only said:

“I don’t want to know about your silly old society. I belonged to silly societies myself at your age. ‘B.B.O.I.C.!’” she mocked. “The Bad Boys’ Only Idiot Company! I know all about those societies. You meet in a smelly old cellar, with one candle, and get all chilled up, and talk about how you’re going to dig treasure,

and somebody has a pistol that won't go, and you snap it off, and you think you're awful smart."

"That's all you know!" said Jimmie with scorn. "You're mad because I won't tell you."

"I wouldn't waste my time listening to you," Edith assured him.

The next day Mr. Simpson, the athletic new minister, called on us.

"You may have noticed that Jimmie is a member of a dark brotherhood?" he said.

"Yes, indeed, we have," said Maria.

"I'm glad to tell you," said Mr. Simpson, "you need not be alarmed at all. Of course, my connection with it is a secret, you understand, and naturally you know nothing about it, but I am sure I'm not betraying any confidence when I tell you that we B.B.O.I.C.'s have harked back to the time in history when all scientific knowledge was a forbidden thing. I'm also getting a bit of history into their heads—the fight between science and religion, you know—to-day happily dead."

Now, while I appreciate the interest that Mr. Simpson took in Jimmie and our boys, I saw how Jimmie would feel to think of him going around assuring parents of their children's safety, making a joke of his connection with their society. No; any way you looked at it, Mr. Simpson's visit, from Jimmie's point of view, was a

breach of good faith. Grown people have no business to play with children unless they play according to the rules of the game. People have to be very careful how they meddle with the world in which boys live and if they enter it they must obey the laws of the country, especially those pertaining to honour.

It was all very well to be at rest concerning Jimmie's society, still I could not blame Maria for exclaiming as she put on her spectacles and peered at Jimmie through them:

"His clothes are disgusting, Editha! Disgusting! Exactly as if he'd cleaned fish in them. And his fingers look the same, too. What is that on your clothes?"

"Blood!" announced Jimmie proudly.

"Blood!" echoed Maria. "What kind of blood?"

Jimmie closed his mouth.

"Can't you answer your Aunt Maria when she speaks to you?" asked Edith. "I should think you'd be ashamed to have blood all over your clothes."

But Jimmie, with his head in the air, stalked from the room.

"I think," Maria complained to me, "that Mr. Simpson might have found some cleaner form

of science for the boys, and something that did not smell so of antiseptics."

After Jimmie was asleep that night Maria tiptoed into his room. She came out after a few minutes with a pair of trousers in her hand. They were very dirty, and smelled villainously of creosote.

"You may be able," said Maria, dangling the offending trousers by a button, "to stand things like this in your house, Editha, but it turns my stomach. I will not sit down at table with a garment saturated with blood—not for all the clergymen in the universe. I'm going to give these trousers a thorough cleaning. I'm going to wash the worst of them out myself, and then send them to the washerwoman—I wouldn't send them as they are to any washerwoman, and have it talked all over the neighbourhood what the first rinsing-water looked like. Besides that, I'm going to put a patch in the seat of these pants before they wear through. If you put a patch on right in the beginning and darn it down good, you'd be surprised to see how much you'd save. Not that I'm not glad to do it for you—you don't need to thank me; I don't expect thanks."

The next morning's mail brought an invitation to Maria to visit an old friend of hers. It was a visit that had to be made without delay, as

her friend was to close up her house shortly for the season. Maria began her preparations for packing at once and left the next day.

After Maria had gone, Jimmie came storming to me saying:

"Where are my pants, mother—my other ones—the ones that Aunt Maria said were dirty? Have you sent 'em to be washed?"

"No, Jimmie," I replied. "I saw your aunt with them."

"She's probably taken them with her," said Edith sarcastically. "Your lovely pants! She can't bear to be separated from them. She took them with her to remember you by, no doubt!"

"Aw, shut up!" snapped Jimmie. "Can't you find 'em, mother?" he went on. "I need those pants—I *want* 'em!"

I went up to Maria's room, but Jimmie's trousers were not there. Maria had left her closet locked.

"You'd better find 'em, mother," Jimmie told me.

"But I can't, Jimmie," I answered. "You'll have to wait till your Aunt Maria comes back."

"They won't do me any good then," said Jimmie.

"Why, what nonsense! They'll be as good then as they are now."

"Well, they won't," replied Jimmie. "I want them pants and I want 'em *now*. That's just like Aunt Maria taking pants that don't belong to her and hiding 'em. I wish she'd learn to let a feller's pants alone!"

"She's shut them up among her things," I told him.

"All right for her!" said Jimmie. "*Let* her shut 'em up! I hope she *has*! It'll learn her; it'll learn her to let pants alone that don't belong to her, perhaps."

That evening, however, he came to me again.

"Mother," he asked, "don't you think you could bust open Aunt Maria's closet?"

"No," I replied, "I don't."

He looked at me with deep meaning. "You'd *better!*"

"If you'll give me a reason, Jimmie——"

"You'd *better!*" he repeated, with a darkling brow.

"Let's talk no more about it."

"There's things worse than *talking!*" said Jimmie, with dark innuendo.

CHAPTER XXXI

WHEN Maria returned home in a week's time, "Good gracious!" was her first remark, as she mounted the stairs, "how stuffy this house seems after Ella's! Editha, you ought to keep the house better aired."

She threw the hall window wide open and her own window, until she could stand the gale no longer. Soon after, Maria and I were sitting sewing in her room, when Edith joined us.

"How you can sit here in this atmosphere," said she in her superior way, "I can't imagine!"

"You talk," her Aunt Maria answered sharply, "as if you were the only one who liked fresh air, Edith. While I don't make a pose, as young folks do nowadays, of enjoying a howling gale blowing down my spinal column, I like my room well aired and keep it so."

"Well," remarked my daughter with characteristic truthfulness, "it's not well aired now, Aunt Maria. It smells as if some of Jimmie's animals had made a nest here."

"Edith!" I said warningly.

"Well, mother, it's *true!* It's more than being stuffy—it's a sort of smell."

Presently Osborn came in to look for me.

"Gee!" he said, "how close it is in here! I don't wonder women are delicate. This room would give tuberculosis to a whale."

Maria was by this time morbidly sensitive about the atmosphere of her room.

"Editha," she cried, "if your children find the air of my room too heavy for their ethereal lungs to breathe, then let them stay out of it, but I don't want to hear any more such talk—from Osborn or any one else. My room is clean. It is well aired. If the air floats in from the hall when any one opens the door, I can't help that."

Next day my sister said to me:

"My room seems dusty"—not for anything would she admit that it smelled close—"and I intend to give it a thorough cleaning."

So she had all the furniture moved out into the hall and all morning long a man thump-thumped her carpet. Finally, "Now," she said, "come and see my room!" She ushered Edith and myself into her room.

Above the smell of general cleanliness and brown soap and water that perfumed the air, above the sachet which Maria liberally strewed among her clothes, there floated the ghost of a little odour. It was not strong, but it was poignant and self-assertive. In other words, it

was a definite and disagreeable smell, as elusive as it was unmistakable. We looked at one another.

“Do you——” began Maria.

“I should say I did!” Edith took her up.

“It’s from the hall,” asserted Maria firmly.

“What do you suppose?” I asked.

“I think it’s sewer-gas,” said Maria.

“Sewer-gas has no smell,” Edith corrected her elder.

“Well, I don’t care what you call it,” said Maria. “It’s from defective drainage, anyhow, and very unwholesome. *I smell bad plumbing!*” she proclaimed in the voice of the giant who smelled the blood of an Englishman. “I wish you’d have Henry call the plumber and attend to it.”

The nameless and offensive little odour that pervaded Maria’s spotless room—for Edith and I knew that it *was* in Maria’s room for all Maria’s indignation—might as well have been what she suggested as anything else. The plumber was forthwith sent for.

“What’s he doing?” Jimmie asked me, as he watched the man make an investigation of the pipes.

“He’s looking,” I told him, “for the queer smell of drainage that’s been in the house lately.”

"Plumbers won't help *that* smell," said Jimmie with that air of mystery he loved to assume.

I paid no attention to this, I was so used to his B.B.O.I.C. air.

Jimmie proved right: we paid ten dollars for the knowledge that nothing was wrong with our plumbing. And the smell, instead of decreasing, grew like a young plant, no longer ill-defined and elusive: it almost made itself visible. It got to a state where one could have cut it with a knife, and even Maria had to admit that her room was the author of it. She admitted it, however, with dignity, for with the air of having been grossly insulted, she said:

"Edith, I know now the origin of that odour: I know what's happened. I venture to say that one of Jimmie's white mice has escaped and has died in the wainscoting of my room. Of course, it had to choose my room to die in!" said Maria majestically. "I can't see how you can let Jimmie indulge such queer tastes."

Now, Jimmie's mice live out in the barn. Maria had issued her ultimatum one fine day, when she said that either the white mice or she would go out to the barn and stay there; and naturally it was the white mice that went.

"Nonsense, Aunt Maria," said Edith. "How

could they get from the barn to your wainscoting?"

"Mice can get anywhere," Maria answered, jerking her embroidery silks viciously. "Destructive little vermin! You'll oblige me, Editha, by telephoning to the carpenter. This can go on no longer."

"I'm thankful you've decided it can't," said Edith. "The fumes from your room pervade the whole house. It smells to me far more as if a cow had died in the wainscoting than a mouse."

"That will do, Edith," commanded Maria sternly, though after Edith left she confided to me:

"I shouldn't be at all surprised to find it was one of the guinea-pigs." Which shows how a smell can grow in a few days.

The carpenter came and we all went around the room sniffing, although the odour was by this time so extreme that it was pretty nearly as bad in one place as another; but by common consent we located it in the neighbourhood of Maria's closet. The carpenter took down the mopboard and nothing was discovered—no hole and no trace of a mouse.

The smell remained.

"It seems to me," said the carpenter, "that the smell comes from further up on the shelf, like."

“There’s nothing on the shelf,” Maria asserted positively, “except some mending of mine. I cleaned those shelves just before I left. There’s nothing there but my largest mending-basket.”

To prove her point, Maria took the capacious basket, in which she keeps her imminent mending, into the room; *but, as Maria came out of the closet with it, the smell came, too.*

CHAPTER XXXII

MARIA dropped the basket on a nearby table.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed. "Good gracious! What is it? Do you suppose Jimmie's pants were bad enough to—to decompose?"

"It's not my pants that are decomposed," replied Jimmie, who had come into the room. "You give 'em to me! I want my pants! I told you, mother, Aunt Maria'd be sorry she took my pants and locked 'em up!"

"Have you known all the time, Jimmie," Maria asked sternly, "where that smell was coming from?"

"I've known *what* it was coming from," said Jimmie. "I didn't know where—I didn't know where you'd put 'em."

"Why didn't you tell?" Edith demanded. "What made you let the whole house get upset?"

"It's a secret," said Jimmie, "a deadly secret. I'll never tell. You give me my pants."

"I intend to find out," Maria said coldly, "what has been making life unendurable for the past week."

"Make her give me my pants, mother! I want

my pants! If she finds out what are in my pants, she'll have to disappear. The B.B.O.I.C. will make her disappear, I tell you!"

"Fiddle!" snorted Maria. "You and your B.B.O.I.C.'s and the silly airs you give yourselves. And if this is what it brings you to——"

She was busy by this time turning from Jimmie's pockets soggy little packets neatly wrapped up, from which Maria read, "'Heart,' 'Liver,' 'Leg'—paugh!—'Lungs,' 'Brains!'"

"You'll be sorry! You'll be sorry!" screamed Jimmie, dancing up and down.

"I see what he's been up to," said Maria angrily. "Dissecting little animals and carrying their disgusting insides around in his pockets! And I must say, Editha, that whether the minister's at the bottom of this or not, I disapprove of it. You'll have to burn these trousers of Jimmie's. Men, whether they're ministers or not, are not fit judges for what boys ought to do."

Maria's last words had had a singularly quieting effect on Jimmie. He no longer danced up and down, trying to wrest his sacred trousers from the profane grasp of Maria. He stood staring at her, open-mouthed, open-eyed, as if he couldn't understand at first what she was saying. Then he advanced a step or two.

"How'd you know," he demanded, an accusing

finger pointing at his aunt, "about Mr. Simpson? Aunt Maria, you've been *listening!* Listening at doors!"

"Listening at doors!" replied his aunt contemptuously. "Do you suppose I'd listen at doors to find out about your foolish society? Mr. Simpson called, you silly little boy, and asked your mother's permission for you to belong to this society."

"Yes," Edith joined in, "everybody knew about your old B.B.O.I.C. We all knew what made you so keen for Sunday-school and church all of a sudden."

Jimmie went white: his face took on that set look that it had now and then of late, the sort of pathetic shadow of a grown-up look which gives me a sudden glimpse of the kind of man Jimmie's going to be in a little while from now.

He turned and faced me. "Is that so, mother?" he demanded. "Did Mr. Simpson come up and tell you about it?"

"I knew something about it, Jimmie. He didn't tell the secrets," I temporised.

Jimmie cut me short. "Then," he said, the lines around his mouth deepening, "Mr. Simpson's a sneak and a liar!" And he turned and left the room, not without a suggestion of dignity.

Maria and Edith looked at each other for a

minute. They understood that things more important had happened inside Jimmie's twisted brain than they could realise. Edith voiced this by saying:

"Now you've done it, Aunt Maria!"

Maria showed her real concern by running out and calling after Jimmie:

"Where are you going, Jimmie?"

And Jimmie called back in the tone of an angry man:

"To tell the fellers!"

At the foot of the stairs he stopped and threw back to me a reproach that went to my heart.

"*You* might have told me," he said, "that it was all a fake!"

I think it was this that hurt him most. I, one of the few grown-ups he trusted, had known all the time about this deceitful business.

CHAPTER XXXIII

JIMMIE was distant and unapproachable for some time, for the betrayal of the B.B.O.I.C.'s made a deep impression on him, and I made a point of not interfering with him, so when Maria enquired:

“What is Jimmie making?”

I answered evasively, “Making?” as though I had not heard a sound of tap-tapping from somewhere during the morning.

“You have ears, I suppose,” Maria retorted drily, “or are you so used to noise, Editha, that you thought Jimmie was just beating time with a hammer? I can tell you that he’s making *something* that bodes no good.”

“What is it?” I wanted to know. “And why should he not be making something?” I asked further. Maria ignored my second question.

“That is what I wish to know,” she said. “Although I can’t tell you what it is he is making, I’ll wager it’s something that should not be made. I’ve been sitting in my room bearing his racket with the patience which I always feel toward your children, although I do not pretend that I have not felt during this morning as though he

were pounding the nails straight into my own cerebellum. But I want to warn you that it is for no good that Jimmie *stops pounding* every time he hears a footstep. Yes, Editha, that's exactly what he's done. He didn't know I was in my room, of course; but every time Seraphy's footstep has passed his door, or Nora's, or Edith's, he has been quiet as the grave, and moreover"—here Maria dropped her voice to one of secrecy—"when Seraphy went into his room for something, I said, 'What is Jimmie doing?' And do you know what she answered me? '*Reading, Miss Maria,*' is what she said. Now, I ask you if that seems natural and normal to you? You know your own children, or should by this time. He was reading with a hammer and nails ten minutes later! If I were in your place, I should go and find out, and whatever it is I should stop him, because you may just as well nip him in the bud. And when you go to his room, you may as well go swiftly and lightly, else you will find him reading."

I knew Maria had stood Jimmie's hammering just as long as she intended to and I knew, too, I should probably find out she was right. So with a sigh I mounted the stairs. I went swiftly and lightly, as Maria had suggested, and pushed open Jimmie's door.

He was reading.

"What," I wanted to know, "have you been making this morning, Jimmie?"

"Making?" he answered, looking up from his book with a puzzled expression.

"Making with a hammer and nails," I suggested.

"I've just been doing a little tinkering," he defended.

"Why do you stop tinkering when anybody comes near you?" I said. "What were you making, Jimmie?"

There are times when sympathy with one's children makes one speak with irritation. He seemed so defenceless. He lay at full length on the floor in a way to conceal the fact that he had not put on a necktie. From the depths of my sympathy I said harshly:

"I want to know what you were making." He threw up his head defiantly.

"Well, I'll tell you what I was making," he gave back. "What I was making was a *reptile pen!* Now tell me I can't keep a snake! Not even trap one," he added bitterly. "Tell me how Seraphy is going to leave and how Aunt Maria won't stand for it. Tell me how Edith will screech and say, 'Ooo-oo-oo!' "—here he imitated his sister's voice—" 'take it away, Jimmie!' I

wish Seraphy *would* leave!" he went on. "I wish Aunt Maria *would* go——"

I cut him short with: "Don't talk foolishly, Jimmie. We have had this snake question up before. Kindly remember that, though your taste may run to vermin, that of the rest of the family does not."

"A fellow," he lamented, "can't learn anything about natural history in a home like this."

"Come," I said in that brisk and conclusive tone that mothers use to their twelve-year-old sons, "let me hear no more such talk. You knew you couldn't have snakes, and you can't have snakes."

So saying I left him.

Later I heard from some far distant spot a tap, tap, tapping. During the week in our neighbourhood many a person must use a hammer and nails, but some unerring instinct told me that Jimmie was sullenly finishing his reptile pen in some secluded spot, and that, in spite of the possibility of Seraphy leaving, in spite of my protest, in spite of the instinct that decrees that womankind shall abhor reptiles, there was the determination, fixed and unalterable in the back of his head, to do what he called "keep a snake."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE next day Maria came to me with a book she had found lying open in Jimmie's room.

"Ah-ha, Editha!" she said, "though you have kept so quiet on the subject, I daresay I am telling you no news when I say I have found out what it is Jimmie is making. I mechanically turned over this book which I found lying upside down, and there it was, open at this page."

The book was one of those books written to instruct boyhood. It tells them how to make canoes, bird-cages, aeroplanes and kitchen tables. The page it was open at gave an active-minded boy minute instructions on how to construct a reptile pen.

"Why they allow books like this," cried my sister, "I do not know! It's all very well, Editha, to pretend they teach a boy how to make useful things, but there is no boy in the world who would not skip all the information how to make a kitchen table, or anything that might be of some value in his home, for that which would tell him how to build a reptile pen, or how to trap some ferocious animal, or build himself something highly undesirable or dangerous to life and limb.

Since I have known Jimmie so well I never pass a book like this in the library without a shudder. Poisonous, such books are! And when I think what we've suffered from animals in this house, to find a menace like this confronting us——”

Here Jimmie appeared before us.

“Mother,” he begged, “can I go off and be gone all day? Don't say no before you hear me out,” he hurried on touchingly. “I'm not going alone. There are two fellows here, real cracker-jack naturalists. They write monographs. And I know woods and places round here and I got talking with them at the soda fountain and they want me to go with them.”

“I should think that would be a very nice thing for Jimmie to do,” said Maria. “I always have said: ‘Jimmie, why can't you interest yourself in botanical subjects, or nice birds, or something pleasant instead of insisting on bringing up bullfrogs?’ And say what you will, Editha, about the interesting transformation of the tadpole, I shall always maintain that a home is not the place for a kerhonking bullfrog to be brought up in.”

“I bet,” Jimmie muttered as he went away, “if 'twas birds I'd brought up, Aunt Maria'd be sore on them instead.” And turning at the door he said: “I bet you'd be sore on birds, Aunt Maria,

if I'd had birds. Eddy Baker's got birds, and no one in his home sleeps a wink after four in the morning. Bullfrogs don't make a noise in the morning, only a little bit at night."

"Where are your friends living?" was the practical question I put to the departing Jimmie.

"Oh, boarding in town," he gave back to me, and dashed off.

"Well, isn't it peaceful!" said Maria, sitting down with a long sigh. "When you think that Jimmie has gone off in good company for a whole day!"

I, however, had not Maria's deep sense of repose. I wished I knew something more about these two young naturalists with whom Jimmie had departed, and there seemed to me something not normal in his departing without having taken with him a large luncheon.

About the middle of the morning Seraphy appeared before me. She had on an amorphous garment which she dignified by the name of "me cape."

"Excuse me, ma'am, Mis' Preston," said she, "for not comin' in and askin' you might I be runnin' out a moment, for it's runnin' out I bin. Me Aunt Ellie's boy come gallopin' on his bicycle, like it was a frantic horse. 'Seraphy,' says he, 'come on and hurry to Ma; she's kilt wid the

highstrides. It's the snakes, the boarders' snakes, that's come to her!' says he. Wid that, Mis' Preston, I threw on me things and ran to me Aunt Ellie's. A crowd as big as a crowd at a fire was standing in front of the house. And small blame to the neighbours, neither, for there at the very winders of the house these two eyes of mine see long black snakes, black snakes and pizen snakes, too. And some says, 'Let's bust in the winders with the hose and drown 'em out,' and some says, 'Leave 'em lay,' and Constable Kelly says 'Move on.' With shame blazin' on me two cheeks I goes right through the dure, and there's me poor Aunt Ellie collapsed in the back kitchen. 'An' have you seen 'em, Seraphy?' she cries. 'Tell me quick, how did it come to you, Aunt Ellie?' I says. 'Collections it was, they told me they had in them little boxes behin' the curtain. Collections of wild, pizen snakes, Seraphy, and I been going to bed these two weeks and snakes has been in boxes under me very mattress.' Then she riz right up where she was half lyin' and half sittin', an' says she to me with her poor eyes starin' out of her head, 'Did ye ever smell a snake, Seraphy?'

" 'Smell a snake, Aunt Ellie?' says I. 'Sure, I've never smelt a snake and what would I be smellin' a snake for?' 'Go up,' she says, 'go up to the door and stick your nose to the key-

hole and you'll know what I mean. When I was doin' their room the cat come in. Then they locked their door and went off for the day, and I heard the cat a-mewin' and yellin', and then, Seraphy, a neighbour calls to me to come and look at me own front winder. An' there I seen what you seen, and 'tis the cat has knocked over all the cages of 'em, and stung to death he may be by this time by adders and vipers! Oo-oo-oo!' she cries, and goes off, poor soul, into highstrikes agen.

"Now, Mis' Preston, ma'am, 'tis bad news I have for ye. *Jimmie is gone, an' Jimmie is gone wid them!* Off for the day snake-hunting has Jimmie gone, and not only snakes but pizen snakes. No good comes from snakes, never in this world from the day of Creation to the hour when me poor Aunt Ellie was stricken down, an' mebbe her front windows busted in by the neighbours' hose by this time, if they get too nervous wid the sights that is to be seen there."

"If anything comes of this, Editha," cried Maria, "I shall blame myself! I saw you wanted to make more enquiries, but I hustled Jimmie off! I know where they've gone, they've gone to Black Adder Pool! You remember Mr. Benham said only last year that on a ledge of Black Adder Pool there was a whole nest of copperheads, and

unfrequented as the spot is I daresay they have increased since then! Oh, think of our poor Jimmie with his impetuous ways hunting poisonous snakes with a forked stick!"

CHAPTER XXXV

ONE of two things happens to the mother of a family by the time her children have grown up as far as mine. Either her nerves are hopelessly ruined or she has acquired a certain stoicism in the face of possible disaster. You can never go to a summer watering place, I notice, without seeing the two sorts of mothers side by side. There are the ones who pace the sea front if their children are a moment late in from sailing, and the other mothers who, even in the face of a tempest, rock placidly on the piazza saying, "Oh, they'll turn up all right," or, "They've found shelter in some other harbour." Now I belong to the "some other harbour" class, and yet, deep down inside me is that suppressed anxiety that the best of us feel until we have our children home again. And, although I must confess I was disagreeable enough to be rather stimulated than otherwise by my sister's lamentations during the afternoon and by Seraphy's eye-moppings, I felt an ever-growing anxiety, though Edith tried to reassure me by saying: "Don't worry, mother. You must know yourself there's no snake living that would bite Jimmie."

And as it got nearer and nearer to supper time and still no Jimmie, I began to feel worried.

Henry came home and Maria greeted him with the news, to which Henry replied:

“Oh, well, Maria, boys have to do a certain number of trying things. I remember very well when I was a boy——”

I did not wish to hear about when Henry was a boy. I began to want to know very much where Jimmie was and I wanted to know *then*. I strolled down to the end of our shrubbery and looked through it up the street. From the other side of the hedge I heard voices. With a leaping of the heart I recognised Jimmie’s! He was saying:

“Aw, go on, Ede! Go on and be a brick; do break him to mother!” To which Edith replied:

“I’ll do no such thing, Jimmie Preston! If you want to bring home stray curs, break them to mother yourself!”

I looked out and saw Jimmie, very freckled, a heart-breaking, fagged air about him of a little boy who won’t give in, no matter how tired he is, leading by a string a small and unlovely dog. In his other hand he clutched a paper bag marked “Millinery.”

“What have you got in there?” Edith wanted to know.

"If you won't do anything for me, I won't tell you anything," Jimmie responded ungraciously.

"Well," said Edith, "you'd better let that pup go before you go to the house, because everybody's awfully excited because you went off snake-hunting."

"Oh, gee!" mourned Jimmie, "I can't do the least thing, not the *least* thing, without the family jumping on me, and when I try not to worry 'em they find out just the same and jump just the same!"

So he came into the house, a dejected little figure, his dejected dog crouching along after him and his crumpled paper bag in one fist, and stood before us waiting for the storm to break.

"Well, son," said Henry, "how's the copper-head business?"

"We didn't see one," said Jimmie disgustedly, but he brightened up to ask: "Say, father, do you know those fellows caught five the other day, and they explained to me all about how they extract the poison from their fangs. They extracted an awful lot the other day and sent it to the laboratory. An' I'm going to learn to do it, too."

Weariness had dropped from him under the spur of scientific interest in the virus of snakes. "Say, father," he cried, "did you ever see the hollow tooth of a poisonous snake?"

Just here we were interrupted by the snarls of fighting dogs. The jealous nose of Piker had smelt out the intruder, and ruffling and bristling, he had stormed down the stairs with the intention of chewing the poor little dog up alive, and had begun upon this engaging task. We separated the dogs.

"Take him away quickly, Jimmie," his father commanded, "or Piker'll kill him."

I restrained Piker while Jimmie went off with the little shivering dog in his arms, saying:

"First one won't let me keep a new pet and then another won't and even Piker won't!"

"What an exhausting day!" sighed Maria.

She picked up the grubby bag marked "Millinery" which Jimmie had left on the floor and tossed it into the empty grate. We rested silently a moment, then Maria shrieked and pointed to the fireplace.

"See!" she cried. "Editha, see what is sticking itself out of the bag!"

I looked and saw a small green head poking itself over the top of the paper bag and winking at us with bright eyes, and darting at us its forked tongue.

"Oh!" shrieked Maria. "Take it away, Henry!"

I heard a pattering of feet. It was Jimmie.

"I knew it!" he cried. "I knew it!" and seizing the paper bag he made away with it. Maria dropped back and put her hand to her head.

"I can bear a great deal, but not everything, Editha," she murmured, "without nervous shock. What are you going to do about Jimmie?"

"Maria," I said, "there is nothing to be done about Jimmie. He is at the Dangerous Age and there he'll stay till he gets over it."

For two or three days after this I saw little of Jimmie, but Seraphy came to me and said:

"Mis' Preston, if it's taking a walk you are going to do, go down the new railroad cut where the sand is, and turn to the right through the clump of pine-trees and find a place where you'll see a stove pipe stickin' up from the ground. It don't look safe to me, Mis' Preston, but I hadn't the heart to stop him. Then thinks I, if anything'd happen, then how would I feel? But remember, Mis' Preston, if he ain't up to one thing, he'll be up to something else!"

I took the walk indicated by Seraphy. There, under the pine-trees, I found one of those half-excavated caves so dear to the heart of boyhood. In it was a sort of fireplace with a stove pipe attached; at the other side stood its sole and lonely furnishing, the reptile pen, and in it Jimmie's green snake. I wondered what had become

of the little dog. I stood there a while and looked at the handiwork of my son. It was not altogether safe. Fireplaces and caves never will seem safe to mothers. I looked at the one lonely article, Jimmie's companion in his refuge from the invading grown-up—like Seraphy, I hadn't the heart.

The Dangerous Age is the Dangerous Age, and fathers and mothers have just got to sit back and wait till their boy gets over it. As Seraphy says, if he's not up to one thing, he'll be up to another.

CHAPTER XXXVI

I HAD seen it coming for quite a while. It began at the honey-bear; it reared up its head when Jimmie peddled our clothes instead of taking them to the Salvation Army, and it came to its climax after the whole house was upset on account of the snake hunt.

"I tell you," said Henry, "something's got to be done about Jimmie. Things can't go on as they are. It isn't fair to the boy. It's *my* fault; I don't pay enough attention to the upbringing of that child."

I wonder if other women feel as I do when they hear their husbands say the dread words, "I know it's my fault." I confess frankly that it makes my heart sink within me. Of course I realise that a woman ought to be glad to have her husband help her bring up the children and run the household: and so I would be if Henry were not so intermittent about it. To be able to cope with the problem one ought, so to speak, to grow up with it. I think Henry's trouble, when he tries to reform his home, is the difficulty of all reformers. They just see that things are wrong, but they don't know what makes them

wrong. Without finding that out they go ahead to right them. Then, too, Henry, in common with all reformers, seems to think he could change the world from the lecture platform.

“What Jimmie needs is work. He needs to realise the value of money, to have some responsibility,” Henry continued. “He needs to be related to the life of this household instead of leading an existence that is like the hobo who lives at home.”

Henry went on quite a while, telling about the superior training he had when he was a boy, about the shoes that he had bought for himself at an early age, and later I saw him in earnest converse with Jimmie.

The next morning Henry did not get up as early as usual. It is his habit to bound out of bed as fast as he can and take a look at his beloved garden before going to the hat factory.

“I’m leaving the responsibility entirely to Jimmie,” he told me. “He’s going to get up every morning and do the watering. That’ll serve a double purpose. It’ll get him out of bed and get him dressed decently, instead of having him dashing the last minute, pulling his trousers on.”

The plan sounded like a splendid one, and Henry’s enthusiasm and belief in his plan were touching. I don’t know why it was that I had a

feeling of uneasiness all that morning. It seemed to me that I heard a great deal of pow-wowing and screeching and more noise than usual.

Just what was happening we were soon to find out. I heard the hurried footsteps of Seraphy. She hastened into the room, breathless.

“All I’ve got to say, Mis’ Preston, is, if yer want to save a single winder in yer house, ye’d better come down and stop Jimmie. For ’tis this very minit he’s standin’ on the back steps an’ squirtin’ the hose on the whole town of young ones, an’ cryin’, ‘Come one, come all, this rock shall fly, From its firm base as soon as I.’ *He’s* not a-flyin’, Mis’ Preston, but the shticks and stones *is* as fast as ever you see! ‘Come in, Jimmie,’ says I, and wid that he whisks the hose on me an’ me not darin’ to say another word for fear he’d be turnin’ it through the screen on me breakfast. ’Twas Jimmie began it. One of the kids from down street come along. ‘Do you want to see Niagara?’ sez Jimmie. Whisht! ‘Here it is,’ turnin’ the hose on him. ’Twas that Denny Scannell. He never says a word but goes off an’ tells some more kids that Niagara is down here, and Jimmie turns the hose on ’em all. An’ some gets mad and goes off to get big brothers, but Jimmie he gets the fight on his side by turnin’ roun’ an’ playin’ that it’s firemen they are an’ between them

they turn the hose on the hay-and-feed man, an' he's gone this minit to get the sheriff. An' the milkman whin he came—Jimmie, fresh as paint, says he, 'D'ye want some water in yer milk?' an' the milk b'y wrenches the hose outer Jimmie's han's an' squirts him good, an' Jimmie gets it back, an' now he's standin' like I sez, ma'am, on the back steps, an' squirtin' it on all who comes, an' the other boys turnin' agin him. Ye'd better come down and stop him, an' bad luck to the day when Jimmie was give the garden hose in his han'!"

Henry, who was nearer dressed than I and who had not waited to hear the end of Seraphy's recitative, had gone down. By the time she was through I heard them coming upstairs together. Jimmie was explaining how it was no fault of his, that he had not meant to turn the hose on the little boy in the first place, but somehow the little boy had got in the way of the stream without any volition on Jimmie's part. He acknowledged that when the big boys came and threw things at him he had to defend himself.

"I should think you would rather have had me squirt the hose than throw rocks at 'em," I heard him say.

I didn't interfere. Since Henry was going to manage Jimmie, I was perfectly willing to leave

the discipline entirely to him. I could hear Henry's voice rise and fall. I think he was doing that futile thing that is called "reasoning" with the child. It seemed to work, for that afternoon Jimmie came home from play quite early and helped his father in the garden. I saw their two heads bobbing up and down together, weeding: and they seemed to be having a pleasant time. And that evening Jimmie was again allowed to use the hose. He came in dripping, however, where Henry and Maria and I were sitting on the piazza.

"My lands!" cried Maria, "how did you get so wet?"

"Say, father, did you know that the hard stream on the hose was just the thing to get at a bees' nest?" burst out Jimmie, ignoring his aunt's question. "And then you wave the water round and round and they can't get after you," Jimmie went on lucidly.

"Where and whose was the bees' nest?" asked Henry. I noticed that his voice was anxious.

"It's just over at Bakers'. I've seen it and seen it there." Here Mrs. Baker came puffing up the walk.

"If there's one thing I hate to do," she began, "it's to complain about a neighbour's child, for I realise perfectly that my own children are as bad

as others' children. On that account I am not going to complain. All I ask is, please don't let Jimmie drown any more of our pigeons. It was very difficult to get near the dove cote on account of the hornets and Eddie is stung twice. I screamed and cried to Jimmie to stop, but he didn't hear me. Boys will be boys, but there is no reason why boys should act like an irresponsible fire department. That's what I often say to my Eddie: 'Be a boy as much as you like, but don't be a town nuisance.' "

During this time Henry was making as handsome apologies as he could and offering to buy as many new pigeons for the Bakers as died. After Mrs. Baker departed Jimmie said with cynicism:

"I bet you lots of them pigeons'll die. Bet you they'd rather take full grown ones than raise new ones. Bet they'll all die awful quick now."

"It doesn't make any difference to me how quickly they die," said his father, "because it's you that's got to pay for them."

"What'll I pay for them *with*?" asked Jimmie suddenly.

"Pay for them out of the money you make in the garden with me," said Henry

"I ain't goin' to work to buy fantailed pigeons for any neighbours. One of those pigeons is sick

already. Bet you it'll die to-night. Eddie said it was going to die. If you're going to spend my money the way *you* feel like spending it, I don't see why I have to earn any."

"We'll talk about that later," said his father, seeking the refuge of the checkmated parent. "Go up and change your clothes now."

"They're most dry," said Jimmie. "Ever since I've been helping you in the garden, it's nothing but 'Change your clothes, Jimmie,' all the time. I'm glad I'm not going to garden any more."

"You go up and change your clothes," Henry repeated.

"There are three things," said Maria, "that you can't trust a boy with. You can't trust a boy with a hose; you can't trust a boy with a gun; and you can't trust a boy with a box of candy. There are three things a boy shouldn't——"

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" cried the exasperated Henry, "you sound exactly like a paraphrase of the Bible. If you can think up any better things to train Jimmie into some sort of decency, I wish you would!"

"Well," said Maria, "I tell you what I think. I think that when he starts a thing he ought to be made to finish it. If he agreed, of his own free will, to help you garden, he ought to be compelled to help for a certain length of time."

CHAPTER XXXVII

NOW any mother in my circumstances knows what it means to compel a boy of twelve or thirteen to do something he doesn't want to do every day of his life. You can compel boys to do things when their work is of some use to the family, that is, you can sometimes compel them; but when their task is an arbitrary one, performed just for the boy's good, it means that you must lead him to the task and stand over him while he does it. Stand over him, too, if you are a modern parent, wondering what good it's doing him, because there is no especial talisman to character building in a boy's sifting ashes or the puny unrelated tasks which are the best substitutes our modern, well-to-do homes have to offer for real work. Seraphy was perfectly right when she told me apropos of a time when I had futilely marked out some work for Jimmie:

"Siftin' ashes ain't goin' to learn him to be industrious, Mis' Preston. Siftin' ashes is only goin' to learn him shirkin' and how to make excuses."

Well, for the rest of the sad, uncomfortable week Henry kept Jimmie at his task. Henry, generally so sweet-tempered, was what one might call

“edgy.” Jimmie, usually so sunny-tempered, went around wrapped in gloom. Home was a lamentable spot. I confess that I was weak-minded enough to wish the term “character building” had never been invented.

Peace and sunshine was what I desired, and peace and sunshine I knew I should never get until Henry ceased riding the hobby of reform. The situation was made none the pleasanter by Maria’s making a “right-about-face.”

“Poor Jimmie,” said she. “It makes my heart ache to see him. He goes around with a hang-dog look. This sort of treatment is what drives boys out of their homes to pool-rooms and other bad places, when they get a little older. A parent’s most precious possession is the confidence and love which his children have for him. Look at Jimmie now. With every weed that he pulls out of that garden, Editha, the weed of rebellion flourishes in his heart.”

Edith voiced her opinion by saying that—

“This has got to be such a snarly, huffy house, I wish I lived somewhere else.” Seraphy boldly put her finger on the trouble by saying:

“Oh, wirra the day when men-folks comes interferin’ wid women-folks’ work. What an’ ever for has got inter Mr. Preston that he can’t go an’ tend to his office an’ leave the house and the childer

to ye, Mis' Preston?" The situation was brought to a climax by Osborn's coming back from camp on a day when he wasn't expected.

"See here," he said with that frankness of youth, "what ails Jimmie, father? See what I got from him." The letter read:

Dear Os:

Come home as quick as you can or I shall do something despurate, I'm being treated like a criminul and I swear to you, Osborn, I haven't done anything; that is not more than usual. Father is treating me as if he hates me. I couldn't tell from where I was that the bees nest was just on top of the pidguns. No fellow can bear more than just so much injustice and I've born more than that already, so come on home, Os, before something drops. When a fellow sees his father and mother haven't any use for him he gets reckluss."

"He feels better already," Osborn said. "I've told him he was a fool, and I've asked him to come over to the camp Saturday, but he thinks you won't let him. He thinks all the world's against him and he better get out of it; but before he goes he feels like making a protest. What's the use of making him uncomfortable?"

"Maybe you can suggest some work that Jimmie'd like," said Henry grimly. "I haven't had a comfortable moment in my garden since I took Jimmie into it. If ever a person's given a fine impersonation of a blighted being, it's Jim-

mie. It's a wonder anything will keep on growing once Jimmie's passed by. Evidently gardening isn't suitable to his temperament. What kind of work would you suggest, that he'd like?"

"There isn't any kind of work a boy doesn't hate," replied my elder son. "The only kind of work they like is what they give themselves to do, and they don't always like that long. Jimmie's an all-right kid. There's the making of a pitcher in Jimmie. I watched him the other day and he can get more on the ball than any kid of his size I ever saw."

Maria had come in during this conversation.

"I've been thinking a great deal about Jimmie lately since everything's been so uncomfortable and unhappy about the house, and I've been wondering why we didn't use Jimmie's natural instincts——"

"The only natural instincts I've found in Jimmie so far," said his father bitterly, "are the instincts of a loafer and a tramp."

"Well," said Osborn, in the voice of one tendering a solution of all difficulties, "school begins next week."

We all sighed. School, that solvent for many ills, school, the modern parents' refuge, was about to open its kindly doors. So the problem that Jimmie presents to us is still unsolved. I know

that there are hundreds and thousands, not to say tens of thousands, of women all over the country who face it. The problem goes something like this:

“How is one to get a boy of twelve or thirteen to do practical work?” which is only another way of saying “How is one to get a boy of twelve or thirteen to take his share of responsibility in the life of the family? How can parents inculcate in their boys those virtues which it will be necessary for them to have if they are to remain outside the poorhouse and the penitentiary?” How does one get a boy of twelve to work when he lives in a family where his work is of no real money value to his family? There is no one in my circle of acquaintances who has solved that problem, and yet, somewhere in this wide land, there must be mothers and fathers who have solved this problem. I have a vision of a thirteen-year-old boy going smiling-faced and undriven to some developing form of toil.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IT was not long after this that school mercifully opened and Osborn went to college. There are some emergencies for which one gets ready for years and which when they come find one unprepared, other things that one dreads and finds them easy. It always seemed to me that I would find the first definite breach in our family life very hard to endure, even though the college to which Osborn went was only a few miles away. But I found that he was back and forth so much that he hardly seemed away to me. He had dropped home for supper one evening when Jimmie leered across at his sister with an indescribably impish and knowing air, an air which, by itself, was enough to put Edith on edge, and said to her:

“Aha!”

Thus challenged, Edith naturally asked: “What’s the matter with *you*?”

To which Jimmie replied again: “Aha!” decisively. Then he piped in a polite falsetto tone: “May I give myself the pleasure of calling upon you, Miss Preston?” and varied it with, “*Miss*

Preston, *may* I give myself the pleasure of calling upon *you?*”

At which Edith flashed at me: “There, he’s been *listening*—sneaking up behind lilac-bushes and *listening*, mother!”

“Listening, nothing!”—she knew Jimmie’s weak point—“Sneaking up, nothing! We all heard it—the bunch of us heard it. We couldn’t help it, could we, if you walked right up to where we was playing mumblety-peg?”

Edith was not to be deflected by any excuse. Having found the way to do what the boys call “get back on” Jimmie, she pursued obstinately:

“You did listen! If you hadn’t listened, you couldn’t have heard, could he, mother?”

“You can hear him a block,” said Jimmie. “His voice starts down in his throat and before he gets through it’s a squeak. It sounds like a rat—an’ he looks like a rat, too.”

“I don’t think,” said Maria, “that that’s a very nice thing to say about anybody. We all look as the Lord made us.”

“Oh, let Jimmie talk, Aunt Maria,” said Edith. “He’s so handsome he can talk about other people’s looks.”

“Ratty Taylor,” Jimmie soliloquised. “That’s what the fellers call him—Ratty Taylor.”

At which Osborn gave out: “Oh, *that* chump!”

"Do you mean those new Taylors who've just moved to town?" Maria asked. "I'm sure that little Taylor boy is a very nice, well-mannered little fellow. At the church social he picked up my glove for me just as politely——"

"He's not a little boy!" Edith cried, flushing. Her aunt's patronising approval of him had touched her more than her brother's ridicule. What was to come was worse, for it was Osborn who announced the final and awful verdict on the unhappy youth.

"He's a *high-brow*," he announced, "that's what he is. For heaven's sake, Ede, you're not going to have *him* sitting around, are you?"

Maria laid down her napkin and folded her hands across it, waiting for the preserved peaches to be passed to her.

"I don't see what ails children nowadays," she said. "When I was young it was thought an honour to stand well in one's classes——"

"And now," Edith broke in, "just the minute a fellow hasn't got great gobs of muscle standing out all over him, and cares about books or anything nice, the other fellows make fun of him and call him all sorts of horrid names. Just because Osborn can play baseball and never looks at a book, he thinks everybody who does is on the bum."

"I'm sure, Edith," admonished Maria, "if that nice, refined boy should hear you say 'on the bum' he wouldn't respect you as much as he does now."

"No; for heaven's sake, Ede," Osborn implored, "don't let him hear you using those rude words of untutored slang, or he'll offer you the frozen mitt."

"He'd be quite right!" said Edith, turning on her brother. "If it wasn't for you I'd talk good English."

"Talk some," said Jimmie. "Let's hear how you do it."

Edith ignored Jimmie and returned to her original attack.

"It's not his fault if he isn't as strong as you are; he had scarlet fever when he was little."

"'Tisn't a girl's fault," replied Osborn, "if she's cross-eyed. I'm sorry for 'em when they are; but I don't like 'em that way. I'm sorry for Taylor, too, if you want me to be," he conceded generously, "but I don't like *him* the way he is, either."

Here the bell rang and Seraphy went to the door. She returned in a moment, a correct little card held ostentatiously between her broad thumb and forefinger.

"It's y'r young man come to see ye, Edith," she grinned.

Osborn reached out his hand for the card, with,

“Let’s look at the little valentine.” Edith ignored her brother’s last taunt, but came over to me and asked in a low voice:

“Don’t you think it’s nearly time that Seraphy began calling me Miss Edith?”

Maria’s sharp ears heard her.

“Why, good gracious, Edith!” she exclaimed. “What an idea! Why, Seraphy’s wiped your nose since you were a baby a year old. She’d as soon think of calling a chicken Miss as you!”

It was thus that Edith went forth to meet her first official caller, Jimmie flinging out after her, “*Miss* Edith, y’r beau has come!”

I suppose there are families where the thirteen-year-old boys live in harmony with their sixteen-year-old sisters; where there is no reciprocal wrangling. Sometimes I wonder if it’s my fault that this is not the case with my children. Still, their little encounter of this evening did not trouble me. I had other things to think of as I took my place by the evening lamp in the back parlour. Of course, the boys in the neighbourhood whom Edith has always known have come to see her with what is known to my children as “the rest of the bunch”; this was different.

I knew, of course, that it would come some time, that my little girl would grow up and become a young lady some day. She’s been trying

very hard to pretend the last year or so that she is one; but she's never seemed less one to me than when she's playing her little make-believe game of grown-up. Edith, with her hair pinned almost up, and with her imitation of grown-up ways, always seems to me like Edith at eight, trailing one of my old skirts behind her, with a shawl thrown over her shoulders and Maria's hat perched on her head, playing the dreary game of "making calls" which for some reason is so dear to little girls.

CHAPTER XXXIX

I WENT on a reconnoitring expedition. Edith did her part very prettily, while Arthur Taylor arose and gave me a very fine dancing-school bow. What stood before me was a tall, weedy youth, with a head too big for his slender shoulders; a bulging forehead, wearing glasses over his rather nice eyes; evidently a tame, gentle boy, with a fondness for books. For the rest, he had a pointed face and longish drab hair, which made the nickname of "Ratty" not inappropriate.

That, I say, is what actually stood in my parlour, making polite bows to me. But what I saw in his person was the beginning of a long line of callers, a new element in my family, young men that I should have to deal with, some of whom I should tactfully have to eliminate; in fact, in Arthur Taylor's guileless person I saw a new era dawning.

I said the polite words to the boy that a mother does under such circumstances. I asked after his father and mother, and how he liked our little town. To which he replied that his father and mother were very well indeed, thank you, and that he liked the city better, probably because he had

been rather lonely at first. Why it irritated me so to hear him say that he found a great comfort in our public library I don't know.

"There's such a splendid collection of poetry here and of philosophy."

"Are you fond of poetry?" I asked him.

"Oh, yes," he said, with a sincere ring in his voice. "It lifts one so out of one's self, doesn't it?"

At which I retreated, leaving him to Edith.

During the next hour and three-quarters, earnest conversation went on in the front room. Without wishing to listen, I couldn't but overhear something, for, as Jimmie observed, there was a carrying quality to Arthur Taylor's voice. It was a fine, high-minded conversation, and I am the last one to make fun of the lofty ambitions of youth even when they come in phrases like:

"I should like to write *one* poem—one great poem—and then die. One wouldn't mind dying, would one, if one could leave one perfect thing, however small, behind one? Do you ever write anything yourself?" he asked suddenly.

"Nothing much," I heard Edith confess, to my amazement. I didn't know that she wrote at all.

"But you *have* written, haven't you? I knew you must have! Do show me what you've written."

At this Edith so far forgot that she was a grown-up young lady as to hide her face in her hands, and say:

"Oh, I couldn't show it to you for worlds! I couldn't show it to anybody—not to my own mother!"

"One never can show one's things to one's own people," he said. "*They* don't understand. One can be awfully lonesome in one's own house!"

"Awfully!" my daughter agreed.

Osborn, who had heard as well as I, lifted a cynical eyebrow at me. I did not respond because I knew that they were expressing that feeling of isolation which all young things have, that sense of the remoteness of one human being from another. We suffer from it poignantly for a while when we're young, and then accustom ourselves to it, and in the end most of us forget about it.

I sat downstairs for some time after the departure of Edith's first caller, thinking back to the time when I was a little girl, and talked the verities with sophomore little young men. I remember how my mother accepted them with good-humoured tolerance and how little attention she paid to them or what they were. I remembered with sudden alarm that I had been only two years older than this when I fixed my young affections upon a youthful missionary, of the weedy, ideal-

istic type that my oldest son calls by the scornful name of "high-brow." It was not my mother's fault that I am not at this moment spending my life on India's Coral Strand; and a resolve grew strong within me to have a greater place in my daughter's life than my mother had in mine, as far as the affairs of the heart were concerned.

When I went upstairs, a light was still burning in Edith's room. I knocked on the door, and before Edith opened it, I heard a hasty rustling of papers. When she opened the door to me, there was a new light in her eye. We talked of indifferent things a moment, and then drifted to the window together and looked out. Then Edith turned to me with a rare movement of sympathy.

"The night's so big and solemn," she murmured, "and we're such little specks!"

We kissed each other good-night with tenderness and I went to my room with a curious feeling of defeat. An evening of sympathy with this weedy boy with glasses had unlocked more of the finer things of my little girl's nature than all my care and all my sympathy. Because of him, and his high-minded little platitudes, I had had a moment of truer understanding with her than I had any time in the previous months, when she had been as unapproachable and as hard as a little green apple.

CHAPTER XL

DURING the next week Edith's caller came with faithful regularity and stayed for long hours, during which time there would not for one instant be a lapse in the conversation. He brought flat little books, which I took to be poetry, and read them aloud.

"Good gracious!" said Maria, "whatever those two can find to talk about so much passes me!"

I knew well enough what they found to talk about—ambition and the briefness of life and the need for not losing a single second of life's precious time, and poetry, and, above all, themselves and what they were going to do.

I say there was no cessation to their conversation. This is not true. There were interruptions, frequent ones, and these were caused by the raids made by Jimmie upon the front parlour. To Jimmie these calls seemed an opportunity sent by heaven to get even with his sister for her superior airs, for her intimations that his hands needed washing, for her comments on the state of his clothes—indeed, for all the things that he had suffered, though not in silence, at his sister's hands. Hitherto he had only been able to re-

venge himself by the swift retort. Edith had always held the upper hand. You see, the right had always been on her side. His hands *were* dirty: his manners needed improving.

Jimmie is getting to the age when there is no place he wishes less to be in than home of an evening. But on the evening that Arthur Taylor called, only a fire would have dragged him forth. Just as the conversation would soar to the infinite, Jimmie would wander through the room. He would go over to a desk where the photographs are kept, and elaborately pull them all out and show them politely to the caller. He found early and unlovely ones of Edith, which he exhibited with the politest manner, knowing well enough that, at the first symptom of rudeness, Edith would have a handle with which to drag him out of the room. Other times he would spend as much as three-quarters of an hour looking through the books and behind the bookcases for his arithmetic, which he knew was not there; and of course Edith had her guns spiked, so to speak, for in the presence of a young man, with whom one is discussing the beauty of life, one cannot very well say to one's brother, as one would like:

"For heaven's sake, stop shuffling those books around and get out!"

One night after tea, as we were all assembled

in the back parlour, Jimmie turned a cynical eye on his sister.

"Aha!" said he, "your beau's comin'."

"How do you know?" flashed Edith.

"I can tell by the powder on your nose," said Jimmie. "If ever I go to see a girl and find powder on her nose, I'll clear out!"

Maria bent forward and peered into Edith's face.

"There *is* powder on her nose!" she asserted. "Editha, do you allow a child of Edith's age to use *powder*?"

"It's not powder, Aunt Maria," said Edith.

"Tooth-powder?" Jimmie enquired in the sweet tone which he employs to annoy his sister when Arthur Taylor is calling.

"It's talcum," Edith snapped. "I don't see why I need to have a nose shining like a door-handle; do you, mother?"

"She doesn't mind how much it shines on us," complained Jimmie. "She just subdues its rays for Arthur."

"That will do, Jimmie," said I.

"Mother," Edith broke out, "does Jimmie have to come spoiling all my fun every time I have a friend come to see me? I want to know! Am I all my life going to have him roosting around every time there's a boy in the house?"

"She doesn't speak to me like that when Arthur is here," Jimmie complained in a tone of pathos.

"Can't he stay out of the room to-night, mother?" Edith asked again.

"I don't want to come in," said Jimmie. "You needn't ask mother. Why don't you deal square? Why didn't *you* tell me if you didn't want me in the room? But I'm not coming anyway—I've got *something better to do!*"

"What are you going to do?" asked Edith with suspicion.

"Never you mind," Jimmie replied, with an irritating intonation.

"Jimmie Preston, you tell me what you're going to do!" his sister demanded.

"You might sometimes answer your sister when she asks you a thing," interposed Maria.

"Well, if you want to know, Aunt Maria, I'm going to do just what Edith wanted me to. She's all the time talking about how Osborn and I haven't any culture. I'm going to get some to-night. I'm going to study some poetry."

Jimmie held a book open in his hands, upon which I could see a piece of paper with lines written that looked like poetry.

"You give me that, Jimmie Preston!" she said. "Mother, tell him to give it to me! It's mine; he's stolen something of mine!"

"Stolen nothing," said Jimmie. "I found this poem lying in a book."

"You give it to me," Edith commanded.

"What is it, Jimmie?" asked Maria.

Just as Edith made a dash at her brother, the doorbell rang and in a moment Seraphy had presented the inevitable card. There was nothing for it but for Edith to go to her caller, though she hissed under her breath at Jimmie:

"You'll be sorry for this!"

Then, as the two settled down to their talk, Jimmie said, raising his voice:

"Yes, I've got some beautiful poetry here. I'll read it to you, Aunt Maria, aloud." And in a high, penetrating voice he read the following lines:

"O Soul, you will not stay with me,
You soar in night's most infinite dark;
When among stars I seek for thee,
Back to deep ocean's swells you hark.

O Soul! when such brief span have we,
When so few days to live there are,
Bring me the secrets of the sea!
Bring news of th' most distant star!"

At the end of this reading Osborn and Maria burst into hearty peals of laughter.

"Oh, read it again, Jimmie!" said Osborn. "Let me see it! That sure is a peach of a masterpiece!"

You could have heard a pin drop in the other room. Arthur and Edith sat there, facing each other like culprits, and Jimmie, leering in, whispered:

“Just look at ’em—caught ’em with the goods on!”

I could say nothing. To reprove Jimmie was only to make the situation worse. Finally Edith, with characteristic courage, walked into the room.

“Would you mind letting me have that paper now, Jimmie?”

“Not a bit,” said Jimmie genially. “I know it by heart. Do you want me to say it to you:

“O Soul! you will not stay with me,
You soar in night’s most infinite dark;”

But Edith had gone back into the other room. I heard Arthur gasp:

“It’s our poem—the one we wrote together! How did he get it?”

And Edith replied dully: “I don’t know—he must have hooked it.”

CHAPTER XLI

THAT night there was no conversation about the infinite. The minutes dragged along miserably and I was glad enough that Arthur left early. Edith walked into the back parlour, her face flaming, her eyes dark.

“You’ll be sorry for this yet, Jimmie!” she repeated.

Jimmie put the table between him and his sister and sang at her, to the tune of “Peter, Peter, Pumpkin-Eater”:

“Bring me the secrets of the sea!
Bring news of th’ most distant star!”

Then he fled from the room, but from the top of the stairs he recited the entire poem, with fine rhetorical effect.

Just how Jimmie discovered that the next night Arthur Taylor intended to call, I don’t know, but, before Arthur came, Jimmie seated himself at the piano picking out tunes with one finger. Edith came in and glowered at him.

“Are you going to sit there and pick at that piano the whole evening?” I heard her say.

Jimmie did not answer but kept on picking out "Way Down Upon the Swanee River" with one finger.

"Jimmie!" I called to him, "if Edith's friend comes, I want you immediately to stop playing the piano."

"Yes, mother," he replied cheerfully. "Just wait a minute—I'm going to play a little thing of my own." And, just as the doorbell rang, to the tune of "Peter, Pumpkin-Eater," he sang clearly:

"Peter, Peter, pumpkin-eater,
Had a soul and couldn't keep her;
He put it in a deep-sea well,
It made his head an ocean swell."

Arthur was ushered into the room at the last words. His face showed plainly that he had heard.

"I was just playing a little poem of mine," volunteered Jimmie. "Do you want me to do it for you?" He began obliging, without waiting for an answer. "I can't play it but once," he said, with an eye on his sister, "'cause mother said I'd got to stop playin' as soon as you came in. But it will only take about a minute."

He grinned evilly on his sister and her unfortunate caller. Arthur was scarlet. He was one of those boys who can't stand ridicule. Edith had ostentatiously provided herself with a pencil and

paper, and, as Jimmie left the room, she said clearly, so as to be heard by the entire family:

“Do you feel like composing to-night, Arthur?”

She could stand ridicule, if you like! She wasn't to be downed by any impishness. But Arthur only faltered out:

“I only just came in for a minute. I—ah—just wanted to ask you if you could let me have that book I lent you.” Edith measured him with a cool gaze.

“You're afraid!” she brought out. “You're afraid of being made fun of by a little twelve-year-old boy—as if anything he said mattered! What would you do if you had him in the house with you all the time? Where'd you be then?”

From the upper landing came Jimmie's cheerful tones:

“Put it in a deep-sea well,
Made the sea and ocean swell.”

Then, on the same key and to the same tune:

“O Soul! will you not stay with me,
You soar in night's most infinite dark.”

Arthur sprang to his feet.

“You are afraid!” said Edith.

From the upper landing Jimmie started caroling.

“Osborn,” I said, “go and stop your brother making that noise.”

But, before Osborn could get more than half-way, Arthur had gone. He *was* afraid. And Edith, without coming into the room to say good-night, went upstairs. On the stairs she met Osborn. I heard their voices in conversation and Osborn turned around and went into her room with her. When I heard him coming down again, I went out to meet him, and we walked up and down the piazza.

“It was tough on Ede,” he admitted, “though I told her that she deserved it. ‘That’s what you ought to get for being a fool,’ I told her. She’s furious at *him*. She says he’s a coward. ‘Sure,’ I told her, ‘he’s a coward. That’s the way with all those poetry fellows—that’s what they’re all like. If you want to have a fellow around, why don’t you have a decent one?’ Then she said, ‘Why don’t you bring over some of the fellows from college?’ ”

“And what did you say?” I asked.

“Oh, I told her,” said Osborn, “that she’s too much of a kid. Do you think the fellows,” he asked anxiously, “would like a kid Ede’s age?”

That was the question that occupied him; the question that occupied me was that Edith was too

young to begin to interest herself in college boys, and I told my son so.

"Oh," he grinned, "girls begin to take an intelligent interest in college boys long before they're Ede's age."

Which, as I look back on my life, I remember to be true.

On the next Saturday night, when Arthur Taylor came timidly into the parlour, he found it already occupied by Osborn and one of his friends. More than that, Edith was playing the piano and the boys were singing.

"There," said Maria, "that's the way I like to see young people enjoy themselves. It seems to me so much more natural, Editha, than to have them perched solemnly on a sofa, like a couple of owls."

After a cheerful hour of song, Osborn proposed that Edith make a Welsh rabbit. The young people all went into the dining-room and Maria and I joined them. The student, a presentable youngster of Osborn's age, was helping Edith, not as one helps the little sister of a college chum, but in that gratifyingly admiring way that one helps a grown-up young lady. Edith was perfectly at her ease, and chatted and laughed as though he were an old friend. The time that she had been spend-

ing on Arthur Taylor, I reflected, had not been wasted.

Osborn was playing host to Arthur, talking to him pleasantly.

Then came a little incident that was so insignificant that no stranger would have noticed it, but which was to be so lasting in its effects as to cause an entire shifting of the balance of power in the house. Up to this time it had been Osborn and Jimmie who have been allied for the purposes of warfare, offensive and defensive. Osborn is Jimmie's bright ideal as an older brother who is a superior ball-player must be to his younger brother. Jimmie as Osborn's henchman had given unquestioning obedience to his powerful brother. Edith had been rather left out of it. Now what happened shifted the balance of power.

Jimmie approached his sister and Osborn's friend, and seated himself beside them. "Here is another young man that I can annoy Edith with," his manner said as plainly as possible. "Watch me do it!" He sat down politely and began to monopolise the conversation as he had done with Arthur.

With a glance Osborn saw what was happening.

"I want to speak to you, Jimmie," he said

adroitly. "Go upstairs and find that fly I made last week. I want to show it to Arthur."

Osborn regarded his sister with new eyes. She had made a hit with a "bully fellow," therefore she was a person to be taken account of in one's life; one to be protected from Jimmie's impishness, as Osborn explained in clear terms to his younger brother after the departure of their guests.

"Don't let me see you," he warned, "trying any of your monkey business on Edith and any of *my* friends that I bring into the house. Understand?"

Jimmie understood. He understood that his world had shifted. He was to understand more and more all along that it was now Osborn and Edith who stood shoulder to shoulder in their little world, while he, the faithful henchman, was to be left out. Edith, to all intents and purposes, was a young lady, material that could be used advantageously in her brother's life, while Jimmie was only a little boy.

After the news had gone forth that Osborn Preston had an "all-right sister" and that his house was an amusing place to pass an evening, Maria said to me:

"I don't know how you feel about the matter, Editha, but my opinion, if you ask me, is that Edith's far too young to begin entertaining young men; for, once a girl gets interested in young men,

she keeps on—there's no use trying to stop her."

I had nothing to say. I know, of course, that Maria is right; but it had already happened. Edith has become interested in young men, and, on the other hand, I can hardly prevent my son from bringing his friends home with him, for, of course, my ideal, like other mothers', is to make home a pleasant place for my boys—so there I am.

Meantime, Arthur Taylor's visits have been shifted to the afternoon; for, if you imagine that Edith has given him up, you are quite mistaken.

"I shall always be a friend of Arthur's," she had the audacity to explain to me, with the gravity of a judge. "I don't think that, as long as one can do a boy good, one should refuse to be his friend. Arthur has a great many things to learn and a girl of my age, even if she's younger in years, is really older than he."

The corollary of this was that Edith was the person of all others fitted to teach Arthur the things he ought to know.

CHAPTER XLII

IT was not long before I was to have more evidence how fast Edith was growing up. All mothers who have been through the same thing will realise what a shock it was to me. Edith and I were going to the local suffrage meeting. I was sitting waiting for Edith to appear. When she finally came in, I greeted her in that not too agreeable fashion common to mothers, with these words:

“I wonder why it is that I always have to do the waiting, Edith.”

To this Edith made reply, “I don’t think I’ll go.”

“Pooh, pooh!” said I. “If you’re going to be as touchy as all that, you will have a very hard time in getting through this world.”

“I am not touchy,” said Edith. “I just think I’ll not go.”

“I’d like to know what you call it,” I retorted—one dearly loves to paint oneself as a model of courtesy and a mirror of good manners when speaking to one’s children, but in common with many parents I find myself erring in politeness nearly as often as my own children err; who

knows but that some of their bad manners may have been learned from me?

"May I ask," said I, "just exactly, Edith, why you're not going?"

"If I told you the truth," Edith replied, "you wouldn't like it. I don't want to quarrel with you, and so I would rather not answer, though it would probably be for your own good if I did tell you."

This statement naturally irritated me still further. It also piqued my curiosity. However, assuming a detached manner, which I was far from feeling, I said:

"Please yourself, Edith, though I should naturally be very glad to know why you don't intend to go with me when we have been planning to go for some time. We go out together seldom enough," I pursued, in spite of myself becoming aggrieved, "so seldom, in fact, that I really wonder that people remember that we are mother and daughter; so I would *like* to know exactly what has changed your plans so suddenly."

"Very well," Edith conceded, "I'll tell you. The reason I don't want to go out with you is that you look *perfectly fierce*; and it makes me feel so uncomfortable to walk along the street and know what all the girls are thinking when they see you dressed the way you are that I just don't care to go, that's all."

“Perfectly fierce!” I echoed, aghast. “What do you mean? This is an entirely appropriate dress to wear to this sort of meeting. It is neat, it fits——”

“It’s neat! It fits!” echoed Edith bitterly. “Clothes for a woman of your distinction have to have more to them than that. It’s a horrid, frumpy old thing, if you want to know. Do you want to know what Caroline Adams said to me the other day? She said, ‘Doesn’t old Miss Rowe wear the funniest old things!’ and I looked up, and coming down the street—*it wasn’t old Miss Rowe, it was you!* And Caroline blushed clear to the roots of her hair, and said, ‘I wasn’t meaning your mother, Edith dear,’—you know how little tact she has—I just meant doesn’t old Miss Rowe wear funny clothes.’ If you think a girl likes to have her mother taken for Miss Rowe——”

I could very well understand that a girl would not like her mother to be taken for Miss Rowe, nor would any mother who thought anything of her looks like to be taken for that excellent if somewhat eccentrically-garbed maiden lady.

I said rather helplessly, “You exaggerate, Edith.”

“Well, I’m just telling you the truth,” Edith asserted. “It isn’t because we are poor that you

need to do it; of course we have to economise, but not half as much as lots of people."

I fell back on this weak argument: "Well, if you are ashamed to go out with your mother, of course, she makes economy for the sake of you children—" To which peroration Edith broke in very rudely with—

"Pooh! That's not the reason. The reason is that you just don't feel like giving up that dress. You're beginning to hang onto things just like Aunt Maria does; and when I think that you haven't got *one* perfectly good suit, and with the styles changing as much as they do this year——"

"I suppose," said I, "you'd like to see *me* in a short skirt."

"I'd like to see you dressed appropriately and properly for a woman of your position," replied Edith. "You always have perfectly lovely reception clothes; you always have sweet house clothes; but for some reason or other you just will *not* spend money for proper tailor clothes. You sneak into a bargain sale and come home with something that looks as if it had been dug up—you know you do! Why you won't go to a real tailor and have a real suit made——"

"Have you ever reflected," said I, "that to go into a tailor's, as you say, costs money?"

"Costs money!" cried Edith. "Of course it

costs money, especially when one is beginning to get a little stout and can't possibly slip into ready-made things! But look at Aunt Maria! Whatever she has and however queer her things are, and even in spite of her dolman and everything, what she does have, I will say for her, is a decent tailor suit. And when have you had one?"

The sad part of all Edith's accusations was that they were true. An inexplicable feeling of chagrin, mingled with something like heartache, assailed me. Some way one is so accustomed to read approval in one's children's eyes. It seems only a minute before that Edith was a little girl who used to kiss my hands and call me her "pretty mother"; and now, overnight, it seems, I had become a middle-aged woman beginning to verge on stoutness (and I had always rather prided myself on my slender and what I deemed still youthful figure), dressed in such dowdy clothes that my daughter was ashamed to walk on the street with me! I suppose there is no woman with a family who doesn't find certain sorts of things hard to buy. As Edith had pointed out with the mercilessness of her years, tailor suits are my aversion—I never have liked them for all their convenience. I now wailed to Edith, "I love pretty things."

"I like smart, appropriate things," she re-

sponded, with the sympathy and briskness of a steel trap. "And while we are on this subject," she continued, "before you get a good tailor suit (you will notice that she took it for granted, and rightly too, that I was going to purchase a suit of the sort she had described) you ought to change the kind of corsets you are wearing. You aren't wearing the sort of corsets that people wear, and you have kept the same kind for years and years; you just get the same sort over and over again. You don't seem to realise that people's figures change."

CHAPTER XLIII

BY the time we were through talking it was too late to go to the meeting. As I sat on the piazza, thinking of our conversation, a chill crept over my spirit, and it was a comforting thing to have Seraphy come out on the piazza rolling her hands around in her apron under pretence of asking me some question, but really for conversation. Said I, in an attempt at lightness:

“Seraphy, it seems that I’ve got to spruce up a bit. Edith has given out orders that I am to get a decent tailor-suit, and I suppose I must.”

“Well, it won’t hurt you none to be gettin’ yer-self for once a rale elegant tailor-suit,” said Seraphy, “instid of spendin’ ivery cent there is on doings for Edith: and now ’tis a party for Osborn, and again ’tis somethin’ else for Jimmie, and so it goes, and what with bicycles and all, and you never gettin’ any good out of the money, no matter how much Mr. Preston do be makin’; but I do wish it was for your own pleasure and not for Edith’s that you were a-doin’ it. An’ if Edith tries the same comther on me, you can tell her she can best save her breath to cool her porridge. Out she comes the other day, and says as smooth as

silk, 'Seraphy, you would be lookin' so swate wid aperns wid brittels and a cunnin' black bow in yer hair.' An' I told her, 'I'd look swater in a budwa cap, Edith, a-waitin' on table for you, and I got a fine piece of calico upstairs and a length of plaid ribbin I was after takin' off my niece's hair when she came to see me—bad luck from her for the bold-faced lookin' thing wid her hair tied wid a plaid ribbin the size of Mis' Preston's sash, so it was—and I can fix me a swate budwa cap from that an' the calico an' mebbe you'd like me to make a little plush apron to wear,' says I. An' says she: 'Seraphy, you'll be a-gettin' the flat-foot if you wear shoes with elastics on the side.' Says I, 'If I keep on wearin' the kind of shoes that has been servin' me standin' on my fate waitin' on you and all of the kids this eighteen year, I tell you one thing I won't be gettin', Edith, whatever else may be I'll be havin', and that won't be corns.' An' the meanin' of it all is, Mis' Preston, you and me is beginnin' to look old to the youngsters, and they're tryin' to fix us over to suit 'em. But let me tell you, if Edith don't like me, she can lump me! An' ye'll see, Mis' Preston, that there's goin' to be no end to this unless ye use yer backbone right on Edith, and mebbe an axe would help, too. 'Tis persistent she is, and always has been, as bad as her aunt, Miss M'ria."

Edith joined me with some sewing. "It seems to me," said she, "Seraphy's been here talking for an hour and a half. She gets more long-winded every day. How you can have patience—but you actually seem to like it! I read and read about its being bad form to gossip with the servants. There are times when I think you enjoy Seraphy's society more than you do that of anybody else in the house."

"Edith," I said severely, "I have had criticism enough for one day."

"I told you you'd get mad," said Edith triumphantly.

"I suppose, being no more than human," I responded tartly, "I don't enjoy being criticised; and as for your referring to Seraphy as a servant, she who has stood by us in sickness and health through all these years——"

"Nevertheless," said Edith, "there's no use getting sentimental about her. Seraphy's a cook, and a cook's a servant, and Seraphy's both, and a stiff-necked one, and I love her just as much as you do, mother, even though I'm not as sentimental in my tone about her."

CHAPTER XLIV

NOW I suppose that I could have borne these comments of Edith's just as other mothers stand their daughters', but it was really Osborn who overthrew the citadel of my complacency.

Edith's harangue was interrupted by his arrival: he had been off visiting friends of his.

"Gee!" said he, after the greetings were over, "that was some swell joint where I was visiting. They had me guessing at first—you know what a quiet one Sammy Greely is. But at home, whew! They have two cars, none of your little dinky mother-made-'em-at-home kind, but the real thing, and everything else to match. And Sammy's mother! I tell you, she's a winner! Why, mother, you ought to see her. She must be as old as you—older maybe—sure, she's older, Sammy's brother Dink graduated last year and he's got a married sister; but looks! I thought it was his sister when I saw her first. I guess she just about runs her town, and they are always sending her around as delegate to this and that, and no wonder—why, she knows everybody in the state, I think, and yet there's not a detail in the house that could make us have more fun that she didn't look

after. And dance! Sammy went up to her and said, just like she was a girl he wasn't quite sure of, 'Mother, may I have the first one with you?'

"Sammy doesn't look as if he came from people like that," Edith commented. "Sammy always seemed so sort of diffident and not sure of himself—though I did notice that he wore awfully expensive neckties and pins."

"Well, you see," Osborn explained, "such a swell gang of his mother's coming and going, I suppose, he's never counted much at home in one sort of way—I mean, of course his mother is perfectly crazy about him, just like any mother, but then he isn't just 'it.'"

"I can tell *you*, Osborn Preston," cried Edith, "it would have done you a world of good if mother had been like that with you."

"Oh, come, Ede! I'm not so stuck on myself. Mother's all right anyway, nice old girl!" and Osborn kissed me. Somehow this outburst of affection didn't comfort me in the least, any more than his next statement:

"But, of course, it would have done me a lot of good, and you, too, and all of us, to have been brought up in that sort of environment. At least, I was surprised to see how well Sammy could hold his own. You know, mother, Sammy's one of these fellows who's a corking listener, simply *cork-*

ing,—he knows an awful lot of things that he doesn't tell you about every minute, but then, of course, he couldn't help it."

"Have they got a lot of money?" Edith asked in that practical way that young people seem to be unable to escape nowadays.

"Oh, no, not such heaps and heaps," Osborn responded. "They're talking of selling one of their cars. They have to watch out some, I suppose. But it's the *women* of that family, the way the house is run—why can't we have this porch fixed over, mother? This is a nicer porch, Edith, than they have—you couldn't dance on theirs: but they've rugs and tea-tables on theirs and—oh, I don't know—potted plants and such things—oh, just everything, and it wouldn't cost much."

"Just suggest it," said Edith with sarcasm, "where Seraphy can hear you. 'Yes, and Mis' Preston,'—she mimicked Seraphy,—'and who's a-goin' to be a-foldin' up the rugs when it comes on to rain in the afternoon and no one at home, an' another lot of things to be kept shined and fixed, and the plants watered, and me goin' to me aunt's funeral mebbe if she dies.'"

"Well, you're a darling old thing!" said Osborn, "and I don't care if this porch does look like a barn. I love it!"

Osborn has become old enough to have assumed

protective airs with me, and he never did drop his little-boy ways of petting me; yet somehow I wasn't comforted. "You can be just as old-fashioned as you want to be," he said, "especially——"

At this Edith interrupted with, "Osborn Preston, you make me sick! There's no reason on earth why mother should be old-fashioned. Look at her! She's got *possibilities*—lots of them! But you just *encourage* mother to just *sit*, and Seraphy rides over her; and if Seraphy had her way mother'd be wearing Congress gaiters, and probably be carrying a black alpaca umbrella and wearing bonnets!" Edith brought out all these words like firecrackers. "Mother's just got lazier and lazier, that's all, and Seraphy runs this house more and more, just as if we were living in a cabin on a peat bog. For heaven's sake, what's that noise?"

In through the open windows came a noise that went "Clump-a-de-clump, clump-a-de-clump, clump, clump."

"It sounds like some one in the parlour," said I.

"I've wondered for a long time," remarked my gracious daughter, "why you persist in using the word 'parlour.' Of all the horrible words in the American language parlour is the worst I know of. 'Folks' is bad enough, but at least there's some-

thing quaint to it. *Everybody* says 'drawing-room,' don't they, Osborn?"

"Clump-a-de-clump, clump-a-de-clump, clump, clump," went the noise. Edith darted in under the open French window, and I heard her cry:

"I tell you, Jimmie Preston, there is just one thing you can't do, and that is to pound your horrible double shuffle, or whatever else it is you are doing with your feet on that dancing floor. Os!" she cried—mind you, appealing to Osborn and not me—"Will you make Jimmie stop?"

For the "clump-a-de-clump, clump-a-de-clump, clump, clump," had gone on calmly.

"Come out here," commanded Osborn in that calm voice of authority in which a head of a clan addresses one of the least of its members. Jimmie appeared. "What were you doing?"

"Dancing," said Jimmie sullenly.

"You've got less sense than any kid of your age and size I've ever seen," was my eldest son's comment upon my younger.

"Now what's the matter?" Jimmie's voice rose to the querulous falsetto of childhood.

"The matter's just this," Edith explained. "I'm not going to have you with your great, heavy, hob-nailed boots beating the floor we dance on to a pulp."

"Where *can* a fellow learn to dance?" com-

plained Jimmie. "When I go to the kitchen, Seraphy chivies me out; if I go upstairs Aunt Maria clasps her hands on her forehead and says I am giving her a headache or loosening the plaster."

"That's enough!" said Osborn. "Stop whining! You know and I know that you can learn to dance without disturbing the peace of the family; that Edith's perfectly right. Now go!"

Jimmie went, like Shakespeare's reluctant child, casting venomous and resentful glances over his shoulder.

"What on earth," cried Edith, "is the matter with the back of your head! Why, mother, look at the back of Jimmie's head! He looks as if he had the mange or something."

I looked, and sure enough, there was a round place as big as a small saucer where the hair seemed as though it had been gnawed off.

"You're fierce, you are!" said Osborn. "What have you been doing to the back of your head—what's your idea?"

"I haven't been doing anything," Jimmie muttered.

"I suppose your hair comes out in that reckless fashion all itself," Edith volunteered.

Osborn took hold of his arm and twisted it slightly, not to give pain but to show authority. "How did your head get like that?" he demanded

in the tone of one accustomed to implicit obedience.

"I suppose it came off against the tub, reading nights," muttered Jimmie.

"There, mother, there!" cried Edith. "I told you! He just gets into the tub, not to get clean, but to read!"

"You think you are in Ancient Rome, I suppose," Osborn threw in with sarcasm.

"Then he reads and reads, and he doesn't even soap himself off, and his neck's never clean nor his ears nor his hands. He just soaks off a little bit."

"I've got as accurate as anything turning the faucets off and on with my toes when the water gets cold," Jimmie gave out in the tone of one announcing a new accomplishment.

"You make me sick!" Osborn responded. There is quite an imaginative trait in Jimmie's nature to which Osborn does not respond at all, and which annoys him intensely.

"It isn't good for you to stay in the tub so long," said Maria, who had joined us on the piazza.

"Well, it's mother's fault," said Edith. "She just lets Jimmie dawdle."

"Mother is too slack with all of us," said Osborn. Here Jimmie flew out with:

"Mother's all right, let me tell you! It makes

me tired the way you talk to mother, Edith—Osborn! If you and lots of others I know had their way, I wouldn't get to do anything I like or have anything I like. I'd be a machine."

"A fine machine you'd be," commented Osborn.
"The kind they throw on the scrap heap."

CHAPTER XLV

HERE Jimmie disappeared. As I saw him go, I wished I had a twelve-year-old boy's ability of crawling into a hole when things got disagreeable; as it was, I went inside and got a book to read. The words that floated to my ears that I could not help hearing cast over me I know not what nameless feeling of sadness. Perhaps I do not have to describe it, for no doubt many mothers who have growing children have felt the same. Osborn and Edith were talking about me with deep affection and deep misunderstanding. Little foibles that I had scarcely noticed were pitilessly apparent. They weren't going to accept them, they were going to make them over, as they were the appointments of the house, my ways of doing things, my actions toward Jimmie and Seraphy. Mistakes that I had made in their own bringing-up—they discussed with the terrible and implacable directness of youth. Perhaps because I only got a broken word here and there made it seem to me more desolating than it really was. These are states I suppose we all go through, and I realised that it was the first time that it had happened to me—that my children had been try-

ing to make me over into their own ideal instead of accepting me as Henry did, as Seraphy did, as Jimmie did. I found myself apologising to myself.

"I am not a dowdy woman; not one who has allowed time to pass me by." Then a bit of spirit surged up in me. "Why," I asked myself, "why shouldn't I be myself if I wish?" Then I tried to be humorous about it. Why give in to these little details; what difference do these things make in me? and yet I knew that these details struck roots as deep as life itself, and that in them were all the worrying of two separate generations. I could stand it no longer. I got up and poked my head through the window with—

"Well, Edith, I suppose you'll be relieved to know that I'm going off to order my tailor-suit." And as I went I heard her saying to Osborn, "Next I shall see about her hair; she has got to do it differently, even if she *buys* some!"

All the way in the trolley the more I pondered about it all, the more I felt as if I had been disowned. Self-reproach swept over me. How much did I understand those two children of mine, and was it my fault? Does any mother ever understand in this way?

It breaks their hearts when they come to this point, if they have the misfortune to think at all;

and if they don't think, I suppose they break their hearts just the same.

Had Sammy's mother kept nearer to her son than I, I wondered? I thought back to the times when children naturally respected their parents with envy, and then I realised that that wasn't at all what I wanted, and that nothing would satisfy me short of loving and intelligent comprehension. Love, I wanted,—I wanted to understand and be understood, as all mothers must, and as a preliminary step towards gaining these ends, I was futilely going over to order a new tailor-suit, and by the next month would probably make the concession of my hair; and yet, the thing I wanted was so much deeper, and the way to it was so much more obscure than the way of tailor-suits and hair-fixings.

When I got home Henry was there. He looked at me with his quick, scrutinising gaze, his head in the air, with a gesture that I have always loved.

"What's the matter, Editha? You've been tiring yourself all out again." He spoke in that tone of loving irritation in which one's men address their foolish women.

"I suppose I am tired," I admitted. I was too tired to try to explain to him what the matter was, and I knew that I could never explain it; Henry wouldn't know what they were driving at.

Suddenly I became very glad that I was not one of those women whose husbands do what is called "outgrow them"—at least I was spared that. So we sat there together in the quiet library, Henry holding my hand as he read the paper. Into this peace broke Edith.

"Mother!" she cried, "Seraphy says that we can't have centrepieces and doilies, no matter if Osborn and I do buy with our own money the mahogany table that we know about that we can get cheap."

I've always hated the fussiness of dozens of little doilies about, but I was in no fighting mood.

"We can't have everything old-fashioned in this house, you know," Edith pursued.

"Well, you aren't on the road to being old-fashioned," Henry retorted with a large and good-humoured sarcasm.

"Nor is mother," gave back Edith with bitterness. "*she's there!*"

At this point Jimmie crept out from some lurking place. He snuggled himself close to me, with his gesture of affection that he has kept over from childhood, but now never uses if he is conscious of it. He possessed himself of my other hand, and I could see that he was a little ashamed of this

"Now," said he, in a tone of half triumph, half overt demonstration.

sympathy, "*now* you see how fierce it is. Now you see how they try to make you over, and won't let you do a single thing you want to, and fuss and fuss and fuss. But," he added, "don't you let 'em. Why"—he went on in a burst of confidence—"if I listened to every fool thing people tell me to do or not to do, I'd be as goody-goody as Leonard Groves, and not a fellow would speak to me, and you'd all hate me!"

In some way at these words a peace, a deeper understanding crept into my troubled spirit, as I sat between Henry and Jimmie, the two men of the family who didn't want to make me over; and the thought arose in my mind with a triumphant, naughty little-girl feeling: "Well, they can't make me over altogether if they want to, and perhaps if they could I'd be so goody-goody they'd hate me as the fellows do Leonard Groves."

CHAPTER XLVI

MORE and more Osborn brought his friends to the house. Edith's new status with him has had a more developing effect upon her than any other thing ever had. Maria put it this way:

"I do really think that Edith is putting on too many airs for a high-school girl of her age. Listen, she's coming in now! She's always fighting with Seraphy!" Here Edith dashed into the room, Seraphy close on her heels. She got in the first word, which was:

"Can't I have company to-night, mother?"

"Indade, she can't then, Mis' Preston," cried Seraphy, "with me bakin', and now company, says she. No, Edith, ye can't have no company. I know how 'tis," Seraphy proclaimed, now fully started. "'We won't give 'em anything but what we have ourselves,' and then it's: 'A few soda biscuits, Seraphy; a little chicken salad, Seraphy; a strawberry shortcake, Seraphy; and serve the coffee in little cups, Seraphy'—nuthin' but what we has always, until we has a six-course dinner and callin' it tea. But I ain't goin' to stand any sich shenanigan, I can tell ye, Edith. You jest ask for yer company a night when the bread isn't put

to riz and the second girl's home to wash up the stack of dishes. And what I want to know, Mis' Preston, is Edith a young lady to be givin' herself airs along with me that wiped the nose of her when she was five—yes, and when she was one, and set up nights with her—or ain't she?"

"Can't you have your company another night, dear?" I enquired. "You see how very inconvenient it is."

But Edith, who had opened her mouth a dozen times to speak, now broke forth:

"You're afraid of Seraphy, every one of you, that's what's the matter! I wouldn't be under anybody's thumb for anything the way all this family's under Seraphy's. If it goes on like this, I suppose we'll all of us have to ask Seraphy's opinion before we do anything. 'Seraphy, may I please have a clean handkerchief?' 'Seraphy, would it inconvenience you if I went out this afternoon instead of you?' And then, when you say the least thing to her, out she comes about wiping your nose when you were a baby and before company or anything. You'd think that she's won an everlasting crown just because she'd wiped our noses. I'm sure I never wanted her to wipe mine—I can remember just how she did it; it was like having it done with a piece of sandpaper, and I can tell you one thing, Seraphy, you've stuffed my

nose down my throat long enough, and I'm not going to stand it any more, and the next time you tell before company or before anybody that you've washed my ears or anything like that—mighty hard and uncomfortable you were about it, too—I'll tell things about you that you perhaps wouldn't like to have told. I'll tell about the time you sat down in the flypaper when your young man came and you didn't dare get up, and there's lots of other things I could think of—and the way Osborn fools you."

Here, to my surprise, I heard sniffs coming from Seraphy. She lifted a tragic, shaking forefinger and pointed it at Edith.

"There, Mis' Preston, there!" said she. "That's all you get for slavin' and toilin' for eighteen years for a pack of youngens like I done for yours. There's never bin the time when I ain't dropped all my work, no matter what it was, and run to make limonade or chocolate or what not. I ain't got a pot fit to cook in, Mis' Preston, this minute, along with molasses candy, and fudge, and the meltin' of bullets, and all that goes on in my kitchen, and the heart's fair broke in me. Eighteen years, Mis' Preston, I've slaved for you and yer youngens, never asked for nuthin' but a decent thank ye. And now Edith's goin' fer me and bitin' me like she was a mad dog." Sniff, sniff!

“The only girl in the house, that oughter be some comfort to me by now! Why, Edith treats any new second girl that hasn’t been with you more’n a couple of years, perliter’n she does me; because she thinks that I’d not be l’avin’ you fer nuthin’. They all think that they can say anything to me, and put on me, but they’re wrong, Mis’ Preston, and I want to say to you right now that I want to go on a vacation; I’m awful tired. No, Edith, don’t ye try an’ come no lovin’ ways on me now; I know it’s the hard-hearted thing ye air.” And Seraphy left the room.

Now, Seraphy had threatened before to go on a vacation. All she has had up to this time have been taken when all of us have been at some seaside place for a time, so we really don’t know what keeping house is like without her. At her words blankness came over me. I reflected on the long years that we had been mistress and maid, and beside that, good friends; on the many kindnesses that we had given and taken on both sides. Through all Seraphy’s troubles I had stood by her; through all my anxieties of bringing my children up, through sickness, through health, she had stood by me. There was never a time when Seraphy was too tired to sit up with a sick child, scarcely a time when she was not eager as I to help out in their merrymakings.

Faithful and indefatigable she had been, as she said, for eighteen years, and there is a relation that grows up between women placed as Seraphy and I have been, knowing as we do all the small and intimate details of one another's lives, that for depth and sincerity rivals most of the friendships I know of on this earth. All this floated through my mind between the time that Seraphy had gotten out of earshot and the time that Edith said eagerly:

"Oh, do you suppose she'll really go, mother? Oh, I think it would be fine to have somebody beside Seraphy for a while!"

"You don't keep up with the times," said Edith, "when you have the same cook all the time. Seraphy's like to have things served just as if we were at a nursery tea. You can't get her to make fancy garnishings!"

"I can tell you, miss," Maria put in, "you'll search many a long day before you find such a good plain cook and such an honest, devoted girl as Seraphy. Garnishings! Fiddlesticks! And while I do think your mother lets Seraphy walk right over her—it's her nature to be ridden on; everybody rides over Editha; she never would take a stand about anything—it's to Seraphy's credit that she isn't worse than she is, with your mother's easy-going disposition. And when you think of

the awful times that most people have had with Poles and Swedes, and all sorts of foreigners who can't speak a word, and never a breath of trouble in your mother's kitchen!"

"Oh, I know," Edith returned impatiently, "I wouldn't have Seraphy go forever for anything. Do you think she's really going, mother?"

"I think you're a cold-hearted little wretch, Edith!"

Downstairs I found Seraphy waiting for me. She had recovered her composure as far as tears went, and she announced with a tranquil firmness:

"Arè ye goin' to advertize for a girl, or will I jist look out for wan, fer as soon as ye git wan it's goin' I am fer three weeks, er a month'd do better, perhaps, because it'll be easier fer ye to git a girl that'll fill in."

At these words it seemed to me that the foundations of my life had shaken and the earth yawned under my feet. While I have been ever grateful to Seraphy, I had not until that moment realised what an extended part she played in the tranquillity and security of my home.

Having made up her mind to depart, Seraphy repapered her shelves, scoured her spotless tins; indeed, went over the whole kitchen with that iron thoroughness which in former days she used to display toward the children's ears and noses.

CHAPTER XLVII

PRESENTLY it was all over and Seraphy had gone and a stranger was installed in my kitchen.

Now, any woman who has had the same girl for a period of years will understand my feelings at the sight of this alien, and will not think it strange when I say that one might have just as well palmed off on me another sister in place of Maria.

I had always had the feeling that the "place," as the saying is, was "an easy one." It is true that I have changed my second girl from time to time, but usually it has been such accidents as marriage or calamities in the girl's own home that have removed them; one or two of them, of course, left on account of things the children did. But what a part Seraphy had played in the contentment of the other maid I had not realised. Places "get a name" and Seraphy, as I found out, has the reputation of being easy to get along with and "willing to lend a hand." In fact, Seraphy has always been able to keep the supply of second girls what it should be without my resorting to intelligence offices. Through some obscure work-

ing of my vanity, I had put this down to my own virtues.

The new cook was a comely, capable, Irish girl, a cousin of Norah's; but bitterness ate at my heart and I said to Edith, not without some temper:

"I'll let you keep house, Edith, and you may put what style you like into the meals."

Supper passed off peacefully, but we were not yet from the table when loud voices arose from the kitchen, and I heard the new cook's voice in staccato:

"Ye can set where you loike, but not in my kitchen!"

Remonstrance in a lower tone from Norah, the second girl.

"Go set in the ice box—go set in the cellar—go set on the pianey!"

"They're fighting," said Maria, in an awe-struck tone.

"They're fighting about the new girl's beau," announced Jimmie, "I know, because that's why she left Sears'. She's got a beau, and she won't let any other girl sit in the kitchen when he comes, and Sears' say she oughtn't to take any place where there's a second girl, and she won't take any place where there ain't one. She gets so mad she throws dishes," Jimmie went on, with

happy expectancy in his voice, "Say, mother, do you think she'll throw a dish at Norah?"

"Well, I mane what I say!" went on the angry voice.

"Editha," said Maria, "you ought to stop this!"

"Yes," said my husband, "Editha, I think this should be stopped!"

Now, I am very much afraid of angry people; I am not accustomed to them; in fact, I'm such a coward that at the sound of dispute I run in the other direction, and now my blood turned to water.

"Edith," I said, turning to my daughter, as manager of the kitchen, "you go out and settle those girls."

"Gee, listen to them!" said Jimmie. "She'll be throwing something pretty soon now." His voice was jubilant.

Edith turned a little pale, but she rose resolutely. Before she could take a step, the down-trodden Norah hurtled in.

"I'm l'avin'!" she cried. "'Twas me own mither said that her cousin would do no good in marryin' into the County of Kerry and us from the Vales of Antrim! It's goin' on like a mad wan she is. Me nerves is shook fierce, and I'll not spend a night under the roof wid her! Takin' a knoife to me she'd be like's not!" I tried to

calm Norah, but there was no use. "It's l'avin' I am," she stated, "I'll send for me trunk in the marnin'."

That evening, friends of Edith's came in, and Edith, as is her custom, asked for cake and lemonade. She reported to me:

"She's sitting in there as quiet with her young man as a turtle-dove; no one would even dream she had a temper like she has."

"What are you going to do, Edith," her father asked, "concerning this outrageous scene she made? We can't have people like that in the house, you know."

A strange, grown-up expression wandered over my Edith's face, the expression that all women know, and which means: "Oh, why can't men mind their own business!" Then she answered: "I shall speak to her about it in the morning, of course, if there is any more trouble."

She might have been a married woman of ten years' standing, as far as dignity and decision went.

The lemonade was long in arriving, but when it did come it was good. The new cook, however, instead of passing things around, put them down on a table and would have gone back had not Edith asked her serenely to pass them, which she

did, with outward meekness; but I thought I saw a glint in her eye.

Next morning Edith reported to me before she went to school that she had had a quiet little talk with the cook. She was evidently quite proud of herself. But hard on Edith's footsteps, followed the cook.

"I've come to give warnin'," she said, "I'll see you through dinner, and I'm leavin' before night. Ye don't need to pay me. 'Tain't money I care for, it's peace." With which shattering statement she marched out.

The family took the news of the cook's departure with composure and Henry said we could make a lark out of it, and we all set to getting supper together.

It may be other people's idea of a joke to have her husband and her son help them getting supper, but it isn't mine. Besides, Maria was seized with a desire to bake a cake, which she did, while she and Edith squabbled, Maria openly blaming Edith for the new cook's having left.

Meanwhile I, who was broiling chops, could hear the sounds of an earthquake in the next room, where in high spirits Henry and Jimmie were setting the table. I could hear Jimmie saying: "Where's the silver kept?" and the sound of one drawer after another being opened; a crash, and

Henry's encouraging voice: "That dish was broken before, anyway; I've broken two glasses since I've started—don't you care!"

"Listen to them!" cried Maria. "I'd go right in and stop them this minute, if I were you, Editha; you know what a drawer of any kind looks like after Henry has pawed through it; and by the sound there's not any drawer or cupboard we won't find gaping and all torn up when we go in."

This comforting picture of my orderly dining room was true. Henry had on one of Seraphy's long kitchen aprons, though he needed an apron no more than he did a feather duster pinned on his head, and I could see by the look Edith cast on her father that she was extremely mortified by his undignified appearance.

"It's great," Henry declared, "not having any servants around; let's keep it up. Look out, Edith; don't step on that broken glass! I thought I'd picked it all up."

At this Osborn came in. He had dropped over from college for supper. On seeing him, Jimmie reached forth a hand, took a stewed prune from the dish, and with unerring aim threw it at his brother. There ensued what I can only describe by the words "rough house."

I hope that no one who reads this has ever had

two six-foot men scuffling joyously around a dining-room while a small boy urges them on to battle, and an excited dog flies around yapping with joy. Whether Piker tripped them up, or whether it was Osborn who tripped up his father, or if Jimmie had a hand—or rather a foot in it—I don't know, but all of a sudden Henry went sprawling across the lowboy upon which my choicest cut glass is piled, a lovely Empire etagere in the middle.

I don't know why it happened to me, or what made me do it—I haven't done such a thing in fifteen years—but as Henry fell crash into the cut glass, as if some strange spring had been touched in me, I burst out sobbing. I suppose the unwonted noise of battle the day before had overstrained my nerves and that I was nervous or something, anyway. My three men looked at me in horror; they'd never, any of them, but Henry, seen me do such a thing, and he not for ages. Even Piker was aware that something extraordinary was happening and he lumbered heavily in my lap with his two horny feet on my shoulders, and lapped off my face with a long, efficient tongue. But, oh, how I rued those tears, which vanished as quickly as they had come and as inexplicably; for, said Henry:

“Children, your mother is tired and over-

wrought; she must not do a single bit of this housework, not a bit, until we get other servants, if you have to stay out of school, Edith, and I don't want Maria to get overtired, either, and I'll help as well."

I heard Maria murmur: "Say good-by to your china, Editha."

The next two days I was treated like an elderly invalid and not allowed to lift hand or foot, while Jimmie and Edith rioted unchecked through the house. It was not considered bad for Maria and me to make up our own beds—otherwise we were sternly told to keep away.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE second afternoon we sat in Maria's room listening to the strange noises that went on in the house.

"What do you suppose that is, Editha?" asked Maria.

"It sounds to me," I replied, "like an ice-cream freezer."

"Oh, I don't mean *that* noise," said Maria, "I've heard that ice-cream freezer; but the chopper—My heavens, Editha, what do you suppose that child is chopping! She's chopped long enough to have chopped up a whole pig! I didn't know that getting a dinner ready could possibly make such a racket! I don't mean any of those kitchen noises, that's Edith. I tiptoed down and peered in through the slide from the butler's pantry, Editha, and the kitchen looks already as if the wrath of Almighty God had passed over it—what I mean is that other noise overhead."

As Maria said this there came a crash, apparently just above where we were sitting.

"That comes from the attic! What on earth!"

Maria and I both started for the attic stairway. We mounted up and there was Jimmie, all the

implements of domestic warfare about him. He had a pail of water, scrubbing brush, sapolio, soda, feather duster, brooms, mops and a great part of the surface of the attic was covered with muddy water.

"What are you doing, Jimmie?" chorused my sister and myself.

"I'm cleaning the attic," he announced, "and getting it to rights. I never saw such a looking attic, and if that darn stepladder hadn't fallen, I'd have had it all done."

"Why didn't you bring the hoe and rake and your father's mowing machine?" said Maria sarcastically.

"A hose and a pickaxe would do more good," replied Jimmie. "Father said you weren't to get yourself tired, Aunt Maria."

"With Henry behind him," Maria said, addressing me, "I don't suppose we can stop him."

"Oh, let him go on," I answered wearily.

Jimmie looked at us as one who says: "There's gratitude!" and we left him to do his worst.

In a short time a large, discoloured spot appeared on the ceiling of Maria's room. Maria looked at it with the blank eyes of one who has gone through too many disasters and expects too many more to take notice of any individual unpleasantness.

"Jimmie," she merely announced, as if it were an ordinary occurrence, "has tipped over the bucket of water." And she went on sewing. So we sat gloomily until Maria sniffed the air.

"I smell fat burning," she announced; "Editha, the deep fat's on fire!"

This roused us from our leaden apathy; together we rushed down the stairs. In the dining room, calm as any cucumber, sat Edith, the "Century" cook-book held fast between her hands.

"Edith, what's that I smell?" cried Maria.

"What's that you're doing with the cook-book?" said I.

Edith looked up with an air of stern calmness.

"I'm looking up in the cook-book," she announced, "how to put out fat when it catches. I know it's here, because I've seen something about it some time."

With a noise that, had it come from any other lips, I would have thought a curse, Maria dashed into the kitchen from which great masses of oily smoke belched forth and began shovelling ashes vigorously into the flaming kettle. I wet a dish towel and gave it to Maria to hold before her eyes, and helped her; then from the midst of the smoke I heard Edith's voice, still calm and composed:

"Ashes—that's what I have found to do," said

she. "I was just getting my croquettes ready."

When we finally put the fire out and the kitchen was airing and Maria and I upstairs were bathing our stinging eyes:

"I don't know how you feel, Editha," Maria told me, "but I'm going to eat my dinner at the hotel to-day."

"I would go with you if I could, Maria," said I. Which shows that what Osborn would call my sporting blood is not what it used to be. When Henry saw my face:

"Have those children been letting you work hard?" he demanded.

"No," I said, "no, Henry, they haven't let me do a thing."

And well I realised why it is that mothers so frequently let their daughters grow up helpless. It is to avoid harrowing experiences like those of this morning.

"Well, you look all tired out," Henry said, "and I tell you what I want you to do. Seraphy's only going to be gone a month; you run down to Springfield and get the very best cook and maid that are to be found. The difference in expense is going to be very small."

Edith clapped her hands.

"That's just what I wanted to do in the be-

ginning," she cried, "but mother wouldn't let me. Now we can have some style. Though I shouldn't mind doing cooking right along," she added briskly.

CHAPTER XLIX

A GREAT many things were made plain to me in the next few days. I understood why women have nervous prostration. I understood that haggard, dragged look that comes after nineteen cooks in one year. I understood that it was only through miraculous good fortune that I had kept Seraphy so long. I learned that ours was a difficult family to work for. It seemed that in our house there are meals at all hours and company every day in the week—this was the reason that the third girl left.

You all know that time when one strange woman after another walks through your kitchen, leaves her quota of disorder, and walks out again; the awful scurrying around to get the place looking a little better for the next one who comes. There is probably not a home in the country where that tragic comedy has not been enacted; I am even told there are some places where it goes on all the time.

At last, after a week of this, which included a high and mighty lady who declared that I had nothing in my kitchen to cook with, and made me out a list of fancy kitchen things that would have

cost some fifty dollars and would have turned Seraphy's hair gray, there came Janie Dooley.

Janie, I shall never forget you!

Fresh-faced and competent was Janie; she carolled like a lark, she brought order out of chaos without complaining; she stripped the embarrassment from the little second girl as one would peel a banana from its skin, and sent her smiling about her work. And oh, how good it was to get some real cooking again after the ten days of misery—all the garnishings, recondite, knowing little dishes that Edith's soul had longed for, blossomed happily under Janie's fingers. She loved company, did Janie; she loved to display her culinary arts; longed to have as many as possible to appreciate her cooking. Janie Dooley had the spirit of the true artist both in her love of perfect accomplishment and in her desire for an audience fit for its reception. We marvelled among ourselves that Janie should have ever been out of a place and at our good luck in getting her. Moreover, she was a teacher as well as a cook, and rejoiced that Edith wished to learn.

"This," I said to Osborn, "would be just the time for you to give that supper party that you have been planning to do."

"Fine!" said Osborn. "You tell what boys you

want, Ede, and I'll tell what girls I need. I want Berenice Doble."

"Aren't you going to ask Marion Tracy?"

"Oh, yes, have her if you want to!" said Osborn loftily, "but I want——"

Here Jimmie gave me an eloquent look and walked out of the room. He cannot bear to have Osborn, the warrior knight, turn to the soft ways of women.

The morning of the day Janie was full of enthusiasm.

"Don't mind about nuthin', ma'am; don't put an eye to table decorations nor nuthin'. Me and Bridgie 'll see to everything!"

She was brimming with human kindness, and filled the kitchen with her large air of smiling complacency, so that the girls and I went over to Osborn's college and drove around and saw the boys' rooms and had tea, and came back to meet Maria just also returning home.

At the door Jimmie met me and in his wake lurked Bridgie. Jimmie beckoned me aside, important.

"We don't know what has become of Janie!"

"What do you mean?" said I.

"She hasn't gone; she's in her room, and the door is locked," said Jimmie. "There isn't a sound." While his face preserved an air of

solemnity suitable to the occasion, there was an undercurrent of gloating.

Henry came in now and I told him of the state of affairs. I went through the desolate kitchen. Bridgie, without Janie behind her, hadn't known what to do; she hadn't even set the table, but told me in a shivering whisper, as if a death had occurred in the house, that when it had come time for Janie to come downstairs, she had gone up to call her and how she had rapped and pounded and how she had told Jimmie.

"I wanted," said Jimmie, "to chop the door right down. If she's hung herself or anything, we can't get her down quick enough!"

"Oh!" shrieked Bridget. "Or if she's chloroformed herself, or whatever she's done, we want to get busy about resuscitating her!"

I went up to the room with Henry. We decided the only thing to do was to break the door open. I heard the noise of something heavy, dragging itself on the floor, and then the sound of weeping.

The hall was getting dark and the whole combination was pretty gruesome, with Jimmy's murmuring: "She's alive, anyhow," in what seemed to me a disappointed tone.

Henry burst in the flimsy door and we all trooped in after him—Maria and Bridgie and

Jimmie and I. Bridgie had got a lamp and held it aloft. There, upon the floor, two legs outstretched before her, supporting herself on her two arms, with her two hands also spread out from the body, sat the swaying form of Janie. Tears coursed down her cheeks from her innocent blue eyes.

"Nobody loves me," she sobbed and hic-coughed. "Nobody loves me, Oh-hoo! Oh-hoo!"

"She's drunk!" Maria hissed in my ear. But here I heard rapid footsteps upon the stairs, as Henry was about to bend over Janie to help her on the bed, and a voice cried:

"What's all this?" Before us stood Seraphy. "Suthin' told me things was wrong, and I cum home; suthin's been telling me things has been fierce, and not a bit of rest have I been havin'. And howly saints, what's this on the floor that ye got, Mis' Preston? Poor crather!" said Sera-phy. "'Tis a drap she's ben takin' and a dacent-looking woman! Aw, ain't it too bad? Come, darlin'! What's that? Nobody luves ye! Shure, Seraphy luves ye! Come an' lay on Seraphy's bed!"

Then Seraphy turned her head around and made a face at us which said clearly: "Get out of here, everybody; I can manage this!"

In a shorter time than one would have believed possible, Seraphy emerged.

"She'll be goin' off soon now," she announced. "Company is it for supper? Sure it's never more in all my life that I felt like cookin' grand than I do the day. Jest tell Osborn to keep 'em amused for a minute and I'll learn 'em suthin' about cookin'! I ben gettin' my cookin' brushed up since I ben away."

And with peace in my heart and peace in my kitchen, I descended with tranquillity to my young people.

CHAPTER L

MANY a time that winter I remembered Seraphy's words, "Edith do be getting to an age when all that's livin' in the house with her wishes she or they was dead!"

One minute you have a healthy little girl, squabbling with her brothers, putting her hair up tentatively, taking little flights in the grown-up world; you stop and do a basket of mending, and behold, while you are filling in the heel of her father's sock, your little girl's skirts have gone down and her hair has gone up and she has acquired a knowing way of dressing, and in fact, she has all about her the alarming consciousness that she is a woman. She has an irascible dignity and one can see that the levity of her elders pains and shocks her. You fumble around blindly in her spirit for the familiar things that you were once able to put your finger on; in place of what you were accustomed to, you find all sorts of strange objects—some have been gotten out of books and some put there by a careless word or a chance phrase, the false and the real so intertwined and mingled that who shall tell which is which?

I made up my mind that the real emotions of a young girl and those that she makes up in her head as appropriate for her are so hard to distinguish one from another that the only thing for a mother to do is to sit and wait and not interfere; sit and wait to find out whether by her interference she might kill some sweet flower of the spirit. And even when these emotions are not her own, but affectations, the best thing for the mother to do, I think, is to stay her hand and to count it all as a step in her daughter's necessary development.

Still, some of these phases follow each other with bewildering quickness. At Easter Edith went to spend a week with Estelle, crying to Jimmie as she got into the taxi to go to the station:

"I'll surely teach you to make fudge when I come back, Jimmie!"

After a week she returned, bringing with her a friend to visit. In the letter in which Edith asked permission to invite Eleanora de Vries she also made me feel how our humble home would be honoured by this presence.

At sight of Eleanora, tall and pale, her interesting face encircled with dark hair, memory stirred within me. There had been a girl at school with me who couldn't stand drafts, with a supersensi-

tive nose, who was always bragging about her feet, which couldn't endure anything but the softest shoes, thus making us all feel coarse and rough beside her. For this reason, we all paid her homage, adoring, grudging, or even savage, according to our natures, and I recognised Eleanora as her kin.

After supper Edith urged Eleanora to play which she did very amiably. She played sad, Slavic things in a minor key while Osborn listened with the aspect of a connoisseur, though well I knew that in college he has only jazz records.

Next morning I saw Edith arranging a little tray.

"Eleanora," I heard her say to Osborn, "isn't feeling quite well this morning. You know, she isn't strong. She oughtn't to have played for us last night after making that long journey. It always takes it out of her to play. Playing with her," Edith went on, "isn't just thumping the piano; she puts herself into it."

"I suppose," agreed my ingenuous son, "that that's what makes it sound so different from other people."

"Of course it is," replied Edith, putting a white flower upon the breakfast tray.

In a few minutes Edith was downstairs again, sniffing the air.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "*what* is that smell? It's father's pipe—it's that nasty bulldog pipe!"

Henry is an early riser, and has time to read his morning paper comfortably in his study before going to business, and Edith now followed him there. What passed between them I don't know, but I do know that he went off puffing at a cigar instead of the despised pipe, and cast me a glance half rueful, half laughing, of a man who has, with good grace, given in to the unreasonable demands of his women folk.

Osborn was sitting around with the air of a man of leisure. What he was doing, as I well knew, was waiting for the glorious appearance of Eleanora.

"Say, Ede," Jimmie called to Edith, "you said when you came back you'd teach me to make fudge."

"Not while Eleanora's here; the smell of such things makes her faint." She spoke with pride as though this was an amiable trait.

"Oh, rats!" responded Jimmie and betook himself to the fastnesses of the back kitchen, where in winter he is allowed to do carpentry work and make experiments that burn his clothes, and all the other things that a boy of thirteen diverts himself with. From the back of the house now there came a rhythmical pounding, not a loud noise,

but persistent. I heard Edith come rapidly and noiselessly downstairs again.

"Os," she whispered, "can't you stop Jimmie? Eleanora doesn't, of course, *say* anything, but I *know* that awful noise he keeps on making hurts her head."

"Sure!" said Osborn, and went out to squelch his brother.

Half an hour later Edith came to me. Her face was scarlet.

"What," she demanded, "is that awful smell throughout the house?"

Now, I had noticed no smell. I sniffed the air.

"I suppose," said I, "it's Seraphy making cabbage-soup."

And here Edith broke through the crust of refinement.

"Oh, now! Oh, now!" she groaned, reverting to the lament of her childhood, "I think it's too bad! It seems to me that everybody's doing things just on purpose."

"Why, good gracious, child," said I, "what do you mean?"

"First, it's father's smoking a horrid black pipe everywhere and now it's cabbage-soup! Oh, I wish I'd never brought any friend home with me!"

Now, ours is a house in which the old-fashioned

viands of a former generation find their place. We eat bacon and greens, corned beef and cabbage, nor do we scorn the boiled dinner. Irish stew, as Seraphy makes it, ranks as a dainty, while the humbler vegetables, such as the carrot, onion and turnip, are all favourites of my husband.

"Edith," I said briskly, "I'm not going to have my entire household ruled by your caprices. Stop this nonsense about the cabbage-soup! If Eleanora doesn't like it she doesn't need to eat it!"

Upon this Edith threw herself on my bed and burst into tears.

"Osborn's the only one who acts nice!" she sobbed. "I don't see why you can't go without nasty smelly vegetables just for the few days Eleanora's here. I don't believe she knows a girl who has cabbage on the table."

It was here that Maria joined us, attracted by the sounds of lamentation.

"Why, what's the matter?" she asked, "what are you crying about, Edith?" And she patted Edith's head.

"It's because Miss Eleanora de Vries is too polite to eat cabbage-soup," I responded tartly.

"Well, well!" said Maria, "what makes you have cabbage-soup, Editha? Don't you remember how mortified you and I were when grandpa *would* come in in his carpet slippers when we had

company? I used to get mortified for very foolish things when I was young—I suppose all youngsters do.”

It was not long after this that sounds of strife reached me. They proceeded from the kitchen. There, gathered together, were Osborn, Edith and Maria, while Seraphy opposed them, a large spoon clutched belligerently in her hand.

“Were it ever so,” she was saying, “Mis’ Preston sez to me, cabbage-soup! Were it ever so, Mis’ Maria, ’tis cabbage-soup it’s goin’ to be! Yes, ma’am, an’ what’s more, Edith, I’ve been scallopin’ up them onions that you wouldn’t hev for dinner yesterday. Bermuda onions has gone awful high, an’ I’ve bin too many years wid y’r ma to go wastin’ good vittles on her, an’ th’ winter a harrud wan, an’ poor folks a-starvin’!”

“Well,” said Osborn, “I should think at least you could keep the doors closed, Seraphy!”

Here Seraphy spied me.

“Mis’ Preston, what th’ mischief an’ all ails th’ bunch av em’, I dunno! Here I’ve bin eighteen years in this house, an’ onions an’ cabbages galore, an’ now they’ve all gone crazy on me, an’ Miss Maria herself that’ll eat cabbage-soup ’till she’ll bust, tryin’ t’get me to take me kittle off!”

It was at this point that I heard a door click. We all turned round, and there, robed in a loose-

fitting white house-dress, her hair drawn down in loose, artistic coils, was Eleanora de Vries.

“Good-morning, Mrs. Preston,” she said. “Good-morning, Miss Osborn. Good morning, Seraphy. When I came out, I smelled something that made me feel I was a child again, and I just followed my nose! It isn’t *possible*—and yet it seems that it *must* be so—that you’re making a real *soupe aux choux*, like our dear old Marie used to make for us in France when I was a child! You darling!” She turned to Edith. “You’ve often heard me tell of that *soupe aux choux*, and you’ve been planning the surprise for me! Oh, Mrs. Preston,” she said, “I *love* cabbage-soup!”

We all breathed again. Edith looked into her friend’s eyes and pressed her hand. Her eyes did not seek mine, for well I knew that, not being proficient in the French tongue, she had not recognised the humble cabbage-soup in her friend’s lyrical praises of *soupe aux choux*.

I’ve given you the account of the incident of the soup in full so that you can realise to what tyranny we were subjected during the stay of Eleanora. I suppose every mother has had this sort of an experience, where her daughters have come home playing the futile and pathetic game of pretence about themselves and their families.

It is all very well for a girl to do it about herself for a time, but to compress her entire family into the mould that she has chosen for them is another matter. Of course, it was made easier for Edith by Osborn's humouring everything that had to do with Eleanora. Between the two of them they so sat on Jimmie that the poor boy was almost non-existent. I would find him glooming on the outskirts of things, grumbling disconsolately:

"I dunno why they're puttin' on so much side for that pale, scrawny, old thing!"

No, there was no way of softening Jimmie. He was the only one who remained unaffected; so Edith finally had to dispose of him by talking to her friend about his being a "real boy," and talking with grown-up magnanimity of "You know, the difficult age!" Though I can tell you that the difficult age of Jimmie seemed to me as a small speck compared to that of Edith.

CHAPTER LI

FROM the first it was easy to see that Eleonora enjoyed uninterrupted flirtation with Osborn better than any of the parties I would have been glad to have had for the young people. Instead, they had long *tête-à-têtes* together and took long walks in the country. It seemed to me that it was not at all the kind of vacation I should have liked as a girl, nor one that Edith or Osborn would naturally have cared for.

My young people had gone on one of their walks, and Maria and I were coming home from a distant part of the town where we had been for tea. The trolley-line branches off and makes through the portion of the town where the mill-hands live. Maria, who is always interested in what goes on around her, said:

“Goodness, look at those boys fighting! Oh, I hope they’re not Italians, or they’ll be stabbing each other with knives!” Then she said, “Why!” and again, “Why! *Editha*, it’s Osborn!” And as the car had stopped here she rose and I after her.

“Sure enough!” cried Maria, “it’s Osborn in a brawl with some of the shop-hands!”

Near by we spied Eleanora and Edith. Eleanora was turning paler than ever, and was murmuring:

“Oh, isn’t it awful! Isn’t it awful!”

Edith watched the fray, with sparks glinting from her eyes. As Osborn’s left hand flew out and landed upon the ear of his opponent, she cried out:

“Good! Jab him another one, Os!”

There was a curious likeness, that I had never before observed, between my two children at that moment. Edith’s face was drawn in the same determined line as her brother’s. That Osborn was enjoying himself, punching his opponent, no one who looked at him for a second could have a doubt. The joy of battle was in him, and it was reflected upon his sister.

But no such exaltation was visible on the face of Eleanora. The whole situation was evidently painful to a girl of her high sensibilities.

“Oh, he shouldn’t have left us here!” she moaned. “Oh, look at his nose—it’s bleeding! Oh!” She held on to the lamp-post for support. “His first duty was to us!”

“Huh!” replied my daughter. It was the first time that familiar monosyllable had passed her lips since she had been home on her vacation, and I could have kissed her for it. “Huh! It’s your

fault, Eleanora, that he's fighting. You said a man ought to prove himself!" These words were uttered without taking her eyes off the scene of battle.

"That brute, you know, was beating a little bit of a boy awfully. That's how it happened," Edith explained to us, her eyes still on the combatants. "We were coming along, and that fellow was whacking the kid, and Os told him to stop, and he said 'None of your lip,' so Os naturally pushed his face in!"

"Oh!" shivered Eleanora. "Oh! It's a terrible, brutal sight!"

These remarks had been exchanged with extreme rapidity, as you can imagine; but just then a low, menacing note came from my daughter's throat, for another young man had joined the fray, taking sides with Osborn's combatant, and in a voice that was curiously like Jimmie's:

"No fair!" Edith shrilled. "No fair!"

"Stop it, Osborn!" cried Maria.

Myself, I said nothing. It isn't a pleasant sight to see two young ruffians attacking one's son.

But here there came over Edith the most extraordinary change. Young ladyhood dropped from her as a garment. The refinement and reserve of the grown-up were as if they had never been. For a moment she reverted to that time

long ago when she was a tomboy and Osborn's henchman, as much, in those days, to be depended upon for aid and comfort as Jimmie himself. Running forward, she flew for a pile of broken bricks inside a yard where a home had been torn down, and these she hurled fiercely, one after another, crying:

"Come on, Eleanora! Let's give it to 'em!"

Bricks thrown at close range by a strong, able-bodied girl, are effective things. One of the men turned around angrily.

"You let my brother alone—you're not playing fair!" cried Edith. Again it was Jimmie's tones.

The suddenness of this unexpected attack from the rear stopped the combat. The three big boys faced Edith, who stood belligerently before them, a brick poised in her hand.

"I'll smash the head of whoever touches my brother again!" said my ultra-refined and lady-like daughter.

"What made him come buttin' in, then, when I was whackin' me brother?" enquired one of them.

"You keep out of this," warned Osborn. "I can take care of 'em."

"Take care, nothing!" Edith informed her brother contemptuously. "They've got you all bunged up now!"

"Indeed, they have, Osborn," joined in Maria, for naturally we had approached during this colloquy, as had apparently everybody else who lived in the houses round about.

"Well," some one suggested, "call it off, you fellows!"

Here a tiny Irishwoman, frail as a sparrow, came up to Osborn.

"See," she said, "if iver ye see anny wan lickin' Danny Maloney, fur th' love av Hivin let 'em, fur 'tis th' Owld Nick's kid he is, though I'm his gran-mother. Stealin' th' lead pipe is what he wuz, out've *our own house*—not some one else's, mind ye—but our own lead pipe out've our own plumbin'! So his brodther up an' whales 'im whin he c'u'd catch 'im." She turned away and walked off, wagging her head and muttering: "Oh, no! Oh, no! Let 'em whale Danny Maloney whin they catch 'im, fur th' love av Hivin, let 'em whale 'im!"

Osborn's two assailants had by this time sneaked off. The crowd was broken up, and by the aid of our various handkerchiefs Osborn was mopping up his somewhat damaged visage and saying to his sister:

"You ought to know better'n to come buttin' in!"

Edith was defending herself with: "Well, if they'd played square, I wouldn't have."

It was I who noticed that our party was incomplete. "Where," I asked, "is Eleanora?"

They all started guiltily. We looked around. At some distance off, sitting on a mound of snow, was a disconsolate figure. We all walked to it. It was Eleanora, who staggered to her feet at our approach.

"Oh, Osborn!" she cried. "Oh, Edith! How could you? I came away—I couldn't stand it! And I think I must have fainted, for I don't remember anything for some time."

"Well, you're all right now, aren't you?" asked Edith, with that brusque manner that I was so familiar with.

"I feel a little shaken," said Eleanora. "I've never seen people fighting like that!"

"Now, see here, Eleanora de Vries," said my daughter, "you know well enough that if it hadn't been for all your talk about 'proving yourself' and all that, Osborn'd never butted in! And *now—and now—*" the clear justice of youth rose within Edith—"you go and *blame* him! Yes, you're *blaming* him, because he wasn't sitting 'round to bring you to. And when he did butt in, you ran away!"

Osborn was walking around moodily. He was

paying little attention to the change coming over his sister. It mattered little to him whether the dominion of Eleanora had vanished out of Edith's life or not. What bothered him was the masculine ethics of the thing, and when Maria asked him:

"Does your nose hurt you much, Osborn?"—for his nose had been somewhat damaged in the fray:

"Nose nothing!" he replied gloomily. "What eats me is that I should have gone butting in and getting myself all chewed up for a no account kid that deserved all that was coming to him!"

And at these words I perceived that it was not only Edith who was slipping out from the dominion of Eleanora.

CHAPTER LII

ONE of Jimmie's chief characteristics is that once an idea has lodged in his brain, it never leaves it. He wanted to learn to make fudge. Edith had promised to teach him during Easter vacation but Eleanora's visit had stopped that. After school opened he tried again. I heard her telling Jimmie she was too busy. At that he stormed to my room.

"Ma," he said, "I want some one to learn me to make fudge."

Here Maria looked up. "I don't see," she gave our plaintively, "*why*, living in a family who speak correctly, that boy's grammar's so bad. And 'ma—ma!' I wonder at you, Editha! He gets *that* from Eddie Baker. You're not a goat, you know, Jimmie."

"I'm the goat most of the time," Jimmie replied gloomily, twiddling the things on his aunt's writing table. "Can't Seraphy teach me to make fudge then? She knows, but she won't teach me. When I asked her, she said, 'And then have me kitchin look forever from morn till even as if the wrath of the Almighty had passed over! You got

guesses and guesses comin', Jimmie—lashin's o' guesses.' ”

“He learns a great deal of uncouth talk from Seraphy as well,” put in Maria. “Why can't he pick up correct expressions as well as incorrect ones?”

“I tell you what, Aunt Maria, you teach me to make fudge. Then there can't be no kick comin' from Seraphy. She's twice as scared o' you as o' mother.” Jimmie spoke with a flattering accent. “They all learned to make fudge off you, anyway. You taught Ede.”

“Well,” Maria agreed, “I don't see why Jimmie shouldn't learn if he wants to, provided he doesn't mess up the kitchen ever without permission, Editha, and clears up after himself. I don't believe in favoritism where children are concerned”—by my sister's virtuous tone one would have gathered that I did—“and as I taught Edith, I don't see any good reason——”

Here, prior to instructing Jimmie in the art of candy making, Maria took her pen and dipped it in the ink bottle; she is one of those exemplary persons who always finish one thing before beginning another. This time she didn't get far.

“Mercy!” she exclaimed. “What's this in my ink bottle? How did it get there? It wasn't there a minute ago.”

She flashed a suspicious glance at Jimmie who, however, was as unconscious as a custard. It's only fair to Jimmie to state that he doesn't do mischievous things for the sake of making people uncomfortable.

"It's hard," Maria proclaimed, "and firmly lodged. Whatever in the world——" She took the bottle to the window and peered down into its black depths. "Editha," she proclaimed, "it's a marble—a *marble*, and it wasn't there a minute ago!"

The inference was all too plain. Maria needed no more words; her accusing eyes rested on her nephew.

"Really, Jimmie," I exclaimed in some irritation, "I do think you might sometimes come into a room without making things unpleasant for us."

But Jimmie was searching eagerly through his pockets. "It's an aggie," he told us with concern. "My best aggie. I don't know how I had it. I thought I just had a han' full o' putties. Gimme that ink bottle, Aunt Maria, that marble's gotta come out!" His tone was absurdly like that of my husband when he has definitely made up his mind about something.

"Yes, and have my carpet spotted with ink," his aunt rejoined, with sarcasm.

"I've gotta have that aggie—it's my mascot,"

persisted Jimmie, with Preston stubbornness. "If I have to bust the bottle I gotta have that marble."

Maria turned eyes on me which said plainly: "See how your lax upbringing makes your children talk to their elders." To Jimmie, however, she only said with careful patience:

"Jimmie, it would serve you right if I left that marble in the neck of the bottle. It *might* help to teach you to be less trying—though I doubt it. I want you to understand that I'm getting it out because I want the ink. I shall give the marble to you if I think fit. I may not give it to you at all."

"Well," cried Jimmie, "that's the first time any of us—even you, Aunt Maria—'s been *mean!* *Mean*, that's what it is to keep a feller's marble! I didn't want to stick it down your old ink bottle."

"Jimmie!" I cautioned warningly.

"Yes, Editha," sneered my exasperated sister, "'*Jimmie!*' That's what I call an adequate punishment for mischief and impertinence. Poor delicate little Jimmie! You'll upset his nerves, Editha."

Jimmie muttered something under his breath. Like all children, nothing infuriates him so as sarcasm. Maria, thoroughly out of temper, was

digging at the offending marble with a penknife.

"Don't put so much forearm into it," warned Jimmie. "You'll bust up the whole thing."

Maria paused. "I didn't ask your advice," she replied coldly, "and if *I* were your mother you'd have been sent to your room to *stay* before you'd had time to be impertinent again."

So saying she gave a choleric dig with the penknife; a sharp snap followed. Ink spouted up into Maria's face and spread itself over the front of her new dress: the released marble rolled to the floor, leaving an inky trail across the light rug. But Jimmie, with the swiftness born of the ball-field, recovered the marble and, without speaking, made what is known as "a quick get-away." I didn't ever hear his feet on the stairs, so I presume he slid down the banister. Meantime I had snatched up the blotting paper and was doing my best to keep the ink spot on Maria's dress from spreading. Maria had sunk into the outstretched arms of a large chair.

"My new dress!" she moaned. "My nice carpet! It seems as if one of the children couldn't come in without making trouble! And when I think he got his marble! But he shan't keep it! I'm not going to appeal to you, Editha; I know you too well. I know the kind of drivel you'll talk about 'justice' and 'his not having meant to.'

I know exactly what you'll say beforehand, and I don't want to hear it. Justice! *I'm* going to have it this time. I'm going to tell your husband, much as I dislike bringing a poor tired man into our difficulties!"

By this time I had done everything I could for Maria's dress, and feeling my own temper rising, I retired from the scene of disaster with what dignity I could.

CHAPTER LIII

THAT evening Henry returned home unusually jaded. There had been rumours of a strike in the hat factory for some time, and I knew he was worried. I hoped Maria's anger might have cooled, or that she could notice for herself Henry's tired face. But he had hardly entered the door before she fired her guns.

Henry listened in silence. There was a moment's pause while he considered the matter. Then he spoke as follows:

"As far as I understand this thing, Maria, you want Jimmie punished because you were unskilful in getting a marble out of an ink-bottle, and spoiled your dress in doing it—then naturally lost your temper."

"The marble had no business to be in my ink bottle, and he had no business to take it after I had told him I intended to keep it," snapped Maria.

"By your own account," Henry continued in a tone that I cannot help admitting was maddeningly judicial, "by your own account, Jimmie let it slip in by mistake. If you can make it clear

to me what the boy's done, I'll punish him. Otherwise not."

"He was extremely impertinent," Maria vouchsafed.

"And you, I suppose, didn't say anything to make him so? You were perfectly courteous to him, of course?" Henry's tone was one of polite interrogation. Then, as Maria didn't answer at once: "One shouldn't expect a greater self-restraint from children than that which we have ourselves. After all, we set them the example."

Having uttered this lofty sentiment Henry arose with the air of one who says the audience is now finished. One might have interpreted the expression on his face into Jimmie's phrase: "Wimmin is fierce."

"Aren't you going to do anything?" queried poor Maria.

"As Editha was there during the scene, I'll leave the matter with her," Henry replied, with suavity.

"Well!" exclaimed Maria. "Well! I can tell you I expected more of Henry. Since no one will do anything, my dress ruined and all, I will take measures. I will request you, Editha, to tell Jimmie to keep out of my room in future. I suppose I *might* have my room to myself?" she enquired in a tone of lofty politeness which was modelled

on Henry's. As she was about to leave the room she turned and sniffed the air. A subtle odour of chocolate penetrated to us.

"What's that odour?" Maria enquired sharply.

"Oh, it's fudge," replied Edith, who now came into the room. "Seraphy's teaching Jimmie."

The sound which came from my sister's mouth could be dignified by no higher name than a snort, and she flounced angrily from the room. For we both knew that, far from being punished, Jimmie was being rewarded for the marble episode. That faint perfume of chocolate was Seraphy's way of announcing that she, for one, sided with Jimmie.

"What ails Aunt Maria?" enquired Edith. Wearily I gave a brief outline of the late disaster.

"Aha!" crowed Edith. "That's why Seraphy is teaching Jimmie!" I pretended not to notice her untimely astuteness.

Supper was not a pleasant meal that evening; Henry when not preoccupied was preternaturally polite. Seraphy passed things about with a grim air of amusement that was highly irritating, Jimmie bolted his food silently, while, if Maria had been younger, I should have said she sulked. I was not sorry when Edith announced that, if I didn't mind, some of her friends were going to drop in that evening.

"We're going to play charades, and can I go up into the attic and get a few things?" she asked. Then turning to Jimmie: "You can help if you want to," she gave out indifferently.

The only feminine weakness that Jimmie has is a love of dressing up. Henry says it is all of a piece with his character and a survival of the age when savages delighted to dress themselves with finery.

"Sure, I'll help you, Ede," he agreed in a tone which he tried to make as indifferent as his sister's, but which could not hide the joy with which he viewed the proposal.

"You'll behave yourself," his sister announced severely.

"Sure," he replied, with good temper. "An' I gotta out o' sight idea for a charade."

As they left the dining-room I heard them whispering and giggling, and my trained nerves forboded mischief.

The young people arrived early, and Seraphy in high good spirits set about making lemonade and preparing other delicacies. When she is in the humour for it nothing delights the good soul more than what she terms "young company."

I greeted my daughter's guests, and then went into the library, and under cover of the evening paper reflected how nice it would be if none of us

ever squabbled and if all of us could be as irreproachable in our manners as people are in books. I was comforting myself with the reflection that, after all, we didn't squabble any more than the people I knew in real life when there came a burst of laughter from the drawing-room.

"Let's go and see what it is. I should like a good laugh myself," said Maria grimly.

We tiptoed to the parlour door. The young people were in a circle while the lamps had been arranged so that the audience were in shadow and the lights fell full on the actors. My eyes travelled to Edith, who was walking up and down. Her face was blackened, but her hair was done in exact reproduction of her Aunt Maria. Her clothes, too, were Maria's. And I recognised them as some my sister had recently had carried to the attic pending the visit of the Salvation Army.

With much spirit Edith was scolding Jimmie, who stood before her in an attitude of submission he does not accord his aunt. Edith walked up and down and her voice and manner were a travesty of her aunt that caused the spectators to rock back and forth with merriment. It was a good piece of acting, and under different circumstances I might have laughed.

After a moment some one drew the curtain and

asked for the word of the charade. The reply came from the audience with unanimity.

“The Black Maria,” they shouted. Up to this moment my sister and I had remained rooted to the spot but now she pulled me away and we stumbled up the stairs together.

In Maria’s room we sat a few moments without speaking; then Maria wailed:

“Oh, it’s awful! Perfectly awful! I shall never hold up my head again! To be held up to ridicule before all the children in town! Oh, I hope no one saw me—that would be too much! Heaven knows I have loved your children, Editha, while I haven’t always approved of them and I hoped they loved me in spite of our differences of opinion. But now——”

Maria gazed out into the darkness with unseeing eyes. Tears sprang to my own. Maria angry is one thing. Maria stricken with grief is another. I put my arms around her.

“They do love you, Maria! They *do!*” I cried. “But children are as cruel as savages. Besides, they had no idea you were there. They do care for you ever and ever so much.”

But Maria only shook her head and motioned me away. She had been wounded not so much in her pride as in her affections.

“Don’t tell Edith,” she commanded. “I don’t want her punished. I’ve tried to do well by the children and, oh, I can’t bear to have them feel that way toward me!”

CHAPTER LIV

AS I went out I heard the sounds of cheerful good-byes. But I didn't join them; instead I went to bed heavy-hearted, for I knew every word Maria had said was true. My sister's idea of a sense of duty toward children and mine differ, but that is no one's fault, and I realised that I had had my share in making their aunt's word count for little, and hadn't made them realise fully how good she had been to them, nursing them when they were sick, mending their clothes, and doing a thousand little things which had always been taken as a matter of course. With resolutions to do better, I went to sleep at last. I had nightmares about my sister and finally I thought I heard her crying for help.

I suppose there is not a mother of a family who could not match me with tales of the things that have happened in the dark watches of the night. How many times in the course of a long life does a family meet hunting for burglars! How many times does one arouse an indignant husband to make him go over the house all in vain! And then perhaps comes the shivering, awful time

when the real burglar arrives and for once you are justified for all the past fruitless nightwalking you have done.

There is a silent, ghostly quality to a sleeping house that I know not how to describe. The familiar aspect of well-known and genial spaces take upon them uncanny airs; curtains turn into white ghosts, chairs and low tables have the look of crouched monsters. Then there are all the fearsome noises of the silent house, the little creakings, the almost inaudible whispers, as though in very truth strange creatures move around by night as the ghost stories of our childhood would have us believe. This on quiet nights. But when the wind howls and the rain beats hissing upon the window-panes and floods of water drip, drip, drip from the eaves, and vines and trees knock against the windows as though trying to get in away from the storm—a house at night is a fearsome place for an average woman.

I wished that I knew where Piker was so that I could have had him accompany me on my ghostly pilgrimage. But Piker, of course, was not around.

Then I heard a scream from Maria, and Edith came out of her room, whispering:

“I heard some one on the roof!”

“It can’t be burglars,” whimpered Maria. “No

burglar would try the piazza roof. Oh, what can it be?"

"I'll soon find out," said Henry grimly.

Snatching an object from Maria's toilet-table, he went to the window. On the piazza roof, which is a low one of not very great pitch, a dark object was faintly visible.

"Hands up!" Henry commanded. "Come here, you fellow! I'll shoot if you try to get away!"

Slowly the dark object approached us, while Maria and I hung back. With great presence of mind, Edith got a lamp and held it so that the light fell on the bright object in her father's hand.

"Come in here," commanded Henry.

It was a dramatic moment, and I confess my heart beat wildly as a big fellow came in feet first through the window. Then I gave a great sigh of relief. It was Osborn!

He looked at his father with clear, angry eyes and began before any of us could speak.

"Seems to me you're making the deuce of a row. You might as well put down Aunt Maria's curling tongs. I thought at first it was the revolver or I'd have dropped down. Suppose you'd *had* a revolver and let it go off, then you'd have felt nice, wouldn't you?"

"What I want to know is what you mean, you young cub, climbing up on the roof this time of

night," Henry broke in angrily. "You ought to be in college."

"That's easy," replied Osborn. "Some o' the fellows and me stayed too late to get in at the boardin' house, so we hoofed it over here. An' we haven't had a thing to eat," he added resentfully. "They're down outside. I was goin' to let 'em in at a window. You needn't make such a row," he added in a conciliatory tone. "'Tisn't as if 'twas the first time. I didn't make a sound, hardly, and if Aunt Maria hadn't screeched so——"

We all knew that what Osborn said was true. I have often waked to find a number of boys at breakfast that I hadn't expected, and have encouraged Osborn always to bring home his friends in and out of season. The scene was put an end to by Seraphy, who entered fully dressed, saying:

"Bring down the young gentlemen, Osborn. I got a snack for ye in the kitchen!"

So after Henry had given a few necessary words of reproof to his son, and Osborn had apologised, we all went to bed again except the boys, who, as Seraphy afterward informed me, acted like the plague of locusts.

"Can I have a few words with you?" Maria asked me after breakfast next morning. Her face was drawn and haggard and I could see she had

been crying. "Editha," she began, "I have come to a decision that has long been in my mind and recent events have crystallised it. I am going to leave your house. I can see it is no place for me. I do not help you. I do not help the children. They have no love for me, and I am not strong enough to stand the shocks to my nervous system that they give me."

I knew she was thinking neither of the nocturnal fright nor the ink bottle episode, but of Edith's insult.

"I don't want to leave you, Editha," she said with tenderness. "This has been my home so long." Her lip trembled. "But I have failed to make my place in it."

"But where will you go, Maria?" I asked helplessly and inadequately.

"Editha," responded Maria, "I am going abroad!"

Now, Maria has often threatened to go away on short visits, but there had never been anything so serious as this. I know that Maria loathes travelling, and thinking of her hacking around Europe among the nondescript and unattached females one finds there wrung my heart. My face, I suppose, showed what I felt.

"Don't cry, Editha," said Maria gently. "It

will be better for all of us. I've a good chance to go with the Addisons."

Maria smiled bravely, for I know she is terribly afraid of the sea. Besides, she is one of those women who have to think and plan for months before they can make the shortest journey with comfort.

"They go in two weeks," she added. That last admission made me plumb the full depths of my sister's heartbreak. As she heard Edith's step on the stairs she called pleasantly: "Come in, Edith, I've something to tell you." And as Edith approached: "I've decided suddenly to go abroad with the Addisons. And you're so clever about clothes, I want your help about what I ought to take."

Edith for a moment gazed at her aunt in open-mouthed wonder. Then there came over her face a singularly grown-up expression. I saw that she realised what I had, that she knew what a strong pressure must have come on her aunt to make her break from all the habits of a lifetime. With a sensibility that I didn't know she had, she flung her arms around her aunt's neck, crying:

"Oh, don't go, Aunt Maria! Oh, please don't go like this! We'll all miss you awfully. And you know you won't like it."

But all Maria did was to shake her head and say:

“Go and find that list of things you made up for Mary Towner when she went abroad.”

As soon as Edith and I were out of her aunt’s room, Edith spoke with her usual directness.

“Aunt Maria saw us last night!” she declared.

I made some evasive answer, to which my daughter replied definitely:

“There’s no use shuffling with *me*. I know Aunt Maria. And she hasn’t even said a thing to me. I feel like a pig!”

Then Edith went to her room to look for the list of things. I went to mine. It was a very different thing to have Maria leave us in the frame of mind in which she was than to have her threaten to go in a fit of petulance. My reflections were broken by Jimmie, who rushed into my room, crying:

“Say, Ma, what’s Aunt Maria going for? Say, is it my fault about the marble?”

“What nonsense, Jimmie,” I replied. “You don’t suppose your aunt would take a step like this about a marble in an ink bottle.”

“Oh, ’tisin’t just the marble. There’s lots o’ other things. The marble just came on top o’ everything else,” he replied, with perspicacity.

I said a few words to soothe him, but he went

away stubbing his toes against the floor, which I knew was the sign of an uneasy conscience. He had no sooner gone than his place was taken by Osborn.

"I think it's rotten Aunt Maria's going," my eldest son announced. "We kids have just chivied her out, that's what!" He looked gloomily at the floor. "We haven't been half decent to her, and now we've made her clear out."

I assuaged my eldest son's conscience as best I could, but he only answered:

"She's fixing her things this minute."

I sighed. Normally, this would have been a two months' task for poor Maria, instead of a two weeks' one. Osborn was still there when Henry entered.

"What's this I hear," he demanded, "about Maria's leaving home so suddenly? I think it's disgraceful, Editha. Not for Maria, but for us. Between you and the children you've practically driven her away."

Manlike, he ignored any part he might have had in the affair, while Osborn nodded his head in confirmation of his father's statement and muttered something about "us kids having acted fierce."

As we three sat there, someway we saw Maria in a new light. She was no longer a somewhat

irritating aunt, but a lonely, middle-aged woman whose position in a family like ours is often unpleasant. A woman, too, who had never spared herself in working for us, and who for her work expected no thanks, and got none. We contemplated this spectacle for some moments, and it was not the pleasanter that it was of our making. Then Henry said with decision:

"I'm going to have a talk with Maria."

Through the open door I could hear the rumble of his big voice, but not his words; but what I did hear was Maria's answer. It came perfectly clear and had the ring of sincerity in it.

"Why, Henry, it never occurred to me it would make a particle of difference to you if I went or stayed, and I don't believe it does!"

Osborn voiced my unspoken thoughts when he said:

"A nice *home* we've made for Aunt Maria."

The next few days the house was a gloomy enough place; that is, for every one but Maria, who went around as with some inner sense of exaltation. She had broken with old ties. She had, temporarily anyway, given up her home. And having weighed our affection for her she had given us up, too. It was sad enough for all of us. The little things that Maria had done to irritate us were all lost now in the memory of her many un-

ostentatious kindnesses. Jimmie voiced it all by saying:

"She was goin' to teach me to make fudge, an' I stuck a marble on her in the ink!"

Meantime, Maria worked incessantly, putting away things, writing letters to the steamship company, and packing. Oddly enough she reminded me of how unremittingly she had worked and how capably when I was getting ready to be married. Well, she had worked something like that ever since, as Seraphy reminded me by saying:

"When Miss Maria is gone, is it you or me's goin' to look after the linen?"

Meantime Maria cut down Edith's list of necessities until Edith told me one day:

"All Aunt Maria's going to take with her new is the rubber-lined toothbrush case I'm making and have a new breadth put into her new tailor-suit! She must be in an awful hurry to get away," Edith ruminated, remembering her aunt's elaborate preparations for ordinary flittings.

"Only a new front breadth and a toothbrush case," mourned my daughter. "It's awful!"

It seems grotesque as I write it, but it *was* awful, for it showed that little by little we had torn Maria up by the roots—that's the truth of it. The days passed only too quickly, and I'm sure

we all tried to do everything we could for Maria in that time.

Our unwonted attentions had little effect on her, for Maria had detached herself from the family when she formed her resolution to leave us.

Only a few days before she was to join the Addison in New York, when we were looking at our mail at breakfast, Maria gave a sharp exclamation:

"See there, Editha!" she cried. "Miss Addison is sick and they've had to put off their sailing date. What am I going to do? I can't sail alone! I've got my ticket, but I *can't*."

"Oh, don't sail, Aunt Maria, *don't* sail!" cried Edith.

Here Jimmie, unconscious of what had happened, stubbed into the room. His face was red under his tan and he was so occupied with what he was about to do that he didn't notice anything else.

"I've got something for you, Aunt Maria," he announced.

So saying he shoved under his aunt's nose an enormous inkstand in which something rattled. Then he glanced around with an expression that said: "If anybody laughs at me they'd better look out!"

Maria took out the object and held it to the light. It was a marble agate.

"It's my aggie mascot," muttered Jimmie. "It'll bring you good luck."

For a moment a smile, such as I hadn't seen for some time, beamed all over Maria's face. She drew Jimmie to her and kissed him, and he in spite of a perfunctory:

"Aw, it ain't nothin'! Aw, cheese it!" permitted his aunt's embrace.

"Thank you very much, Jimmie, and—and if you haven't made any other plans for my room, Editha, I think I'll put off my sailing for a while," said Maria.

CHAPTER LV

AFTER that there followed one of those periods of tranquillity in which one's spirit revives. Edith spent a great deal of time with her intimate friend, Marion Tracy. There were few of the usual bickerings between Maria and Seraphy, and Seraphy and Edith. Even Maria and Jimmie ceased to clash. But no one is destined to have more than a taste of the golden age in this imperfect world and it was what Henry calls Jimmie's Annual Animal who made me realise the tenure we have on peace is as fragile as a soap bubble.

The tender influence of spring showed itself in various ways. Osborn betook himself to the ball-field. Edith and Marion became more exclusive in their friendship. With Jimmie, spring shows itself by a renewal of his passion for what Seraphy calls "Unchancy Animals."

I knew that the hour had struck when I heard Maria saying:

"Well, ask your mother. I'm perfectly sure she doesn't want this house made a pound of any more than I do!"

I went to the head of the stairs in the front

hall. Jimmie stood holding a string at the other end of which was a dog, whose lean flanks and drooping, apprehensive ears showed that he was a lost dog, and had been lost for some time.

"I don't care," Jimmie was saying as I descended the stairs. "I don't care what you say, Aunt Maria, if he *is* sent to the pound he's going to have one good meal before he dies. Beside that, this dog is a good dog; he's a setter pup, that's what he is, and I always wanted a bird dog."

"Editha, is this dog going to stay?" Maria demanded, turning to me. "If he's going to stay, let me know at once, so I can make up my mind to it and act accordingly; but if he isn't going to stay, just tell me about it and let my mind be at rest. I knew as soon as spring was well under way Jimmie would get another animal again. I should think," went on my sister, "that Piker would be enough dog for any household, and when I think how the animals have walked through this house! Talk of walking in two by two, Editha! to my certain knowledge animals have walked through this house six by six, if not twelve by twelve, when it comes to white mice and guinea pigs!"

I looked at the dog: it looked at me with wistful, appealing eyes, and then sank down to the

floor and curled itself up. I judged it had been running for days and days, and being utterly tired out, and seeing that for a moment no one would harm it, it slept.

"I know," said Maria shortly, "what's going to happen to that dog; it's going to stay! Thank God I am a patient woman, Editha!"

Just here Edith, Marion and Berenice Doble came in. To Edith's enquiry:

"What's that, Jimmie?" Jimmie replied shortly:

"That's a dog."

"Thank you," replied Edith, with insulting dignity. "I shouldn't have known it."

"But it *is* a dog," said Berenice, "and it's a very good dog, too, and it looks to me like a setter. If it was only fed up and combed out I think you'd find it was a very good setter, Edith."

As Osborn strolled in Berenice appealed to him: "Isn't that a setter, Osborn?" she asked in the tone of one who leans heavily upon the wisdom of her superior.

Osborn looked the dog over carefully. He bent back the dog's gum and examined his teeth: he lifted his overgrown puppy foot with the wise air of a connoisseur—Osborn, I may here add, knows no more about dogs than any other intelligent boy of nineteen who has had no special op-

portunity of studying this interesting species of animal.

After mature consideration: "Sure it's a setter," Osborn pronounced. "What'll you take for him, Jimmie? I'll buy him off'n you."

"Well," said Maria, "all I can say is, Editha, that if Osborn buys that dog—and Heaven knows it's highway robbery on Jimmie's part to take a penny for him—let him keep him over at college; that's all I say. Piker is dog enough and to spare for this family!"

Berenice had seated herself beside the setter pup, rubbing his head with an expert hand, talking dog talk the while to him.

There is something about Berenice Doble that had always irritated me. In the first place, she is three years older than Edith, and wouldn't be in the high school at all if she'd ever studied. She's a large, strong girl, good at sports and accustomed to go with her father, who is our grocer, on his frequent shooting and fishing expeditions, for Mr. Doble and several of his friends are the best shots in our town. He and Berenice come home with a string of fish from a trout stream which Henry and Osborn will whip in vain. So you quite understand why it irritated me to have a strong, athletic girl, who can tramp all day alongside of her six-foot father, put on dependent airs

before Osborn; besides, I knew very well that if there is a man who knows about dogs in our town, it's Mr. Doble, and that everything he knew, Berenice knew too, and her deference to Osborn was nothing but a pose.

I'm perfectly sure that before Berenice began making a fuss over that stray pup, Osborn had hardly noticed her; as for her noticing Osborn—of course she had. They'd been at school together. Osborn, by virtue of being captain of the high school baseball team, was naturally the most prominent boy. So I should like to know exactly why Berenice should have made a friend of a girl so much younger than herself as Edith, and one besides who was neither in her set nor went to her church.

The dog, recognising a friend, crept close to Berenice and put his head on her knees. She smoothed his ears down and felt him over with a hand that was far more practised than Osborn's. She lifted her round eyes:

"Don't you think," she asked my son, "he'd like a drink of water? You told me one time that lost dogs were not half as hungry as they were thirsty."

"Get some water," said Osborn shortly, and Jimmie obeyed like the arrow from the bow.

Jimmie returned with a dipperful, and the dog

began lapping greedily. I was about to go my way when Seraphy hove in view.

"Aha!" she cried. "And that's what you was wantin' my dipper for, Jimmie! Ain't it enough for ye to be stuffin' all the cake on me down your throat without usin' me own tin dipper that I drink out of meself fur dogs that might have the hydrophobia, fur all you know—and slobbering of it he is, Mis' Preston, all over the new front rug! You can jest march along, Jimmie, and use the sapolio on that dipper under me eye. Ain't what Piker drinks out of good enough for stray dogs? Ain't the back woodshed a good enough place for dogs to be drinking anyhow?" Seraphy demanded belligerently. "And what I want to know is, Mis' Preston, is that pup goin' to stay?"

"Oh, dry up, Seraphy," Osborn gave out. Seraphy beamed at Osborn. "That dog's going to live in college with me."

"Oh," replied Seraphy. "I didn't know it was *your* dog, Osborn. I've got some cake new baked," she added invitingly.

CHAPTER LVI

BERENICE continued to pet the dog. "You'll come to-night, won't you, Edith?" Marion asked.

"I told Arthur Taylor I'd be home," Edith said doubtfully.

"Oh, Arthur Taylor!" said Marion. "Send him a note you can't see him!"

"I think," said Osborn at supper that evening, "that when a girl makes an engagement with a fellow, she ought to keep it."

"You're consistent, aren't you, Osborn?" Edith replied with sarcasm. "I thought you couldn't stand Arthur Taylor, and now, just because I'm sending Jimmie with a note to tell him not to come, you get awfully moral all of a sudden."

"There!" said he. "Isn't that like a girl? They haven't any *principle*; that's what ails 'em, and that's really what makes fellows hate 'em so."

"Huh!" said Jimmie, who has lately in our family been left out of things more and more. "Much fellows hate girls!" Osborn ignored his younger brother's sneer.

"They put everything up to personality and not to principle. If I like Ratty Taylor, I ought to

think that breaking an engagement with him is a crime; if I don't like him, I ought to think it's a virtue.' ”

“Well,” said Edith hotly, “don't you think you ought to want to do more for the people you like than for the people you don't like?”

“I think,” said Osborn, “you ought to be able to know your own mind. I don't see how your liking him or not liking him has anything to do with keeping your engagements.”

“He ought to be grateful I'm kind to him at all,” said Edith.

“He ought to be grateful,” Osborn assented, “that he's allowed to live on the earth—that nobody's stepped on him by mistake; but I don't see what that has got to do with you, Ede. All I think is, it's due to yourself to keep your own appointments.”

“Well,” said Edith, “thank Heaven, I'm not a martinet!”

“Oh, you don't need to tell us,” said Osborn, “that you thank Heaven daily that you're not as others are!”

Here Maria, anxious to allay hostilities, enquired:

“Why don't you want your little friend to come this evening?”

“She's giving her 'little friend' the kibosh,”

Osborn explained, "because of Marion—who else? Marion whistles and of course Edith has to go and dance. You may not be a martinet, Edith, but you haven't got any more independence than a rabbit!"

In the brutality of family life, a young girl's emotions are always being dragged out into the light of ribald discussion.

"That's right," said Jimmie. "Everything Marion says goes. Ever since Marion said my hair was red, Edith has gone around calling it auburn."

"So it is," said Edith. "I like auburn hair."

"Well, my hair won't change itself to please either Marion or you," said Jimmie. "It's chestnut; it isn't a bit redder than yours, Edith Preston!"

"I do think, Edith," said Maria, "that you are too much under Marion's influence. You just let her do your thinking for you."

"Just because Marion and I have the same opinions, it isn't any sign, Aunt Maria, that she does my thinking for me. Similar minds come to the same conclusions," replied Edith.

"Huh! You're a copy-cat," said Jimmie. "You've changed the way you do your hair."

"Anyway," Osborn joined in, "it's the high pressure of this friendship between girls that

makes me tired. And they're not real friends, anyhow; they go together for a while, and then get mad at each other; and the more they used to like each other, the harder they scrap. It's going to be a fierce volcanic eruption all right when Marion and Ede bust."

"Osborn Preston," Edith said, and there was a hint of tears in her voice, "I won't have you talk like that. Marion and I are never going to be separated—never!"

"I bet you they'll be pulling hair in two months!" said Jimmie the cynic.

"I bet you they will, too, kid," replied Osborn.

This was more than Edith could stand. It was as though a mother should have been joked about putting her son out-of-doors; it was as though the young bride should have had her divorce predicted for her, or the young girl in the first flush of her first love-affair had to look into the future and see a separation for a trivial cause staring her in the face. For all the poignant emotions that Edith had at this moment were summed up in her devotion to her friend Marion. It stood in her life for all the higher things; it was a symbol, the only door through which she might look as yet at the highest emotions of which the heart is capable; it was a sacred thing. At the boys' teasing, tears

started to her eyes and being angry at herself, she vented it by saying:

"All the same, Osborn Preston, I'm going with Marion this evening, and I'm not going to see that Taylor boy," by which appellation Edith calls the young lad who formerly led her intellect into the land of poesy.

"Well," said Osborn, "I wish the girls were coming to-night, because some of the fellows said they'd be over, and Owen Greave is coming." He tried to let this last name drift from his lips in a casual sort of way. Owen Greave is the man of his class every one praises. He is the coming man in athletics; he is the sort of lad who has combined with real ability a certain magnetism that makes him adored by boys. He is the sort of boy who would be besieged by girls except that his lack of vanity kept him from observing anything but the most open attacks. For any boy to have Owen Greave at his house is like introducing the heir presumptive to the family circle.

At this information Edith's anger dropped like a hauled-down flag.

"Oh, I think Marion would love to meet him!" cried Edith. "Oh, Os, you're an old dear! I'll go through that call from that tiresome boy just to please you."

Osborn laughed. Edith, when not annoyed or self-conscious, has a beguiling manner.

"There," he said. "There, you see, mother! Nothing for principle, but everything for the affections."

"Well," said Henry, taking part in the conversation for the first time, for he had been apparently reading, "you can just thank your stars, son, that's the way women are built."

"Say, Ede," Osborn took advantage of his sister's soft mood to say, "I wouldn't go with that Belle Mather if I were you."

"I don't," replied Edith coldly.

"Well, I saw you on the street with her."

"What's the matter with Belle Mather?" I asked.

"You don't know how boys talk in college, mother," said Osborn. "There's nothing the matter with Belle, but she just gets too gay and the boys make remarks."

"She's nothing but a pretty, silly little thing," I suggested.

"That's just what Marion and I are trying to combat," said Edith heartily. "Girls are foolish because boys make them so. Belle's too good-tempered to keep fellows in their proper places, and then they go off and talk about her; and I think it's disgusting!"

“I don’t like her bunch,” said Osborn. “They act silly on the street, always waiting around for fellows. It was all right when you were a little girl, but now that you’re beginning to know my friends——”

“You talk to them all right, Os,” observed Jimmie.

“That’s different,” replied Osborn.

CHAPTER LVII

THE evening passed off pleasantly except for poor Arthur Taylor, who was left in a corner to his own devices, and the next afternoon Marion and Edith were sitting reading on the piazza, and Maria and I were at a little distance sewing, when Maria threw out to Edith:

"Well, how did you like Mr. Greave? He wasn't as fascinating as I expected he would be. Just from the glimpse I had of him he seemed a little heavy and quiet."

Here Edith exclaimed: "I think he has more character, Aunt Maria, than any boy I've ever met."

"Yes," Marion corroborated, "you feel that he has *depth*." There was a different tone in the words of both toward young Greave than that in which they usually discuss boys.

"I did like his looks," said Edith.

"Well, he is not my idea of a handsome man," Maria said.

"I dislike handsome men intensely," said Marion. "There is something really disgusting to me about a man of whom one says at first sight,

‘Isn’t he good-looking?’ I like a man to look *manly!*”

“And strong,” Edith supplemented.

“Yet he ought to have the appearance of gentleness.”

“The strongest men are always gentle and kind,” Edith added.

I saw they were performing a little antiphonal chant in praise of Mr. Owen Greave. They were indeed singularly alike, as was proven by their both being touched more than they had ever been before, by the same boy.

I have observed that the happiest thing in young girls’ friendships is when they both can be good friends with the other’s sweetheart, but when each prefers a different type of man. But unfortunately Marion and Edith centred their attention on Owen, as I realised the day Owen made his first call. After the custom of indulgent American elders, Maria and I passed the time of day with young Mr. Greave, and then made excuses to leave the young people together. I ordered lemonade and cakes, and beckoned Jimmie away from his post of observation in the window, while Maria said to me:

“Did you see that? Those two girls are *all of a flutter!* I didn’t think that Edith had it in her, nor Marion either. They’ve always acted as if

they'd swallowed a ramrod. I must say I do think too much *sang-froid* is unbecoming in young girls. But to-day——”

What Maria had said was true; the girls were in a flutter. I think that during the time that followed, the comings and goings of Owen Greave was the most important thing in life to them both.

Meanwhile the big boy, Owen Greave, remained as unruffled as a pan of milk. He called now on one girl and now on the other. It was evidently a matter of honour for whichever girl he called upon to telephone for her friend. Often Osborn went with him and Berenice joined them, so while Osborn and Berenice walked together, Owen walked with Marion and Edith. Maria watched this little comedy with steadily growing disapproval.

“I should think you would do something,” she told me. “There’s going to be a fine scene one of these days.”

“Why, what’s the matter?” said I.

“What’s the matter?” said Maria. “I should think, if you have eyes in your head, you could see that Edith is getting just as sentimental as she can be about Owen Greave; and so is Marion. Edith is far too young to be thinking about boys the way she is. I believe in young people having a good time——”

"Why, Maria," I interrupted, "I thought you were pleased at Edith's changed attitude."

"I like to see young girls show a becoming interest in young men," said Maria. "The way young girls patronise them these days is offensive. But when a girl barely turned sixteen looks at a young fellow who has never thought of her twice except as a friend—as if she were a love-sick kitten—I think steps should be taken. But you, Editha, were always as blind as a bat. Now I've been able to see what was happening to Edith, and regretting it, for a long time. Well, one good thing is, she is so young she'll get over it right away."

I should like to know what steps one could take. Alas! a sixteen-year-old girl can fall in love as thoroughly as one of twenty-six; she can go through all the comedy of hopes and fears and of hope deferred, and no one on earth can protect her from it. It is useless for her aunt to object because she looks at her beloved like a sick kitten, and to urge that something be done. And even if you know that the flurry of sentiment is to pass, and leave little trace behind it for lack of fuel on which to feed, you know that your girl is at sea in a new circle of emotions, and you can't help her. You can't tell her anything, and you must pretend, unless she comes to you, that you don't

know what is passing in her mind, because, very likely, she doesn't know herself.

Older people do not take seriously enough the trials of their young girls, nor the troubles of their young sons. We treat all their emotions from the point of view that they will soon get over them. Our boys' love-affairs we call calf-love; our girls' first affairs we call sentimentality. Because they can't think of marriage since they are so young, we look upon these boy and girl affairs as of no account at all and yet I don't believe that human beings have changed so much from the time when fourteen-year-old Juliet was a woman. Because of our conditions in this country, we treat them as children, and their emotions as children's emotions, and yet this is not so; their emotions are the emotions of grown-up men and women, and they are as capable of suffering. I do not think we should forget that these emotions of theirs are forming their characters for good or ill more than almost anything that may happen to them later. I don't know whether the tragedy doesn't lie in the very comedy of the whole affair. The very springtime of our emotions, the first flower of the spirit, in our modern life, is generally ridiculed, and almost inevitably destined to be stamped out.

I don't think that Edith realised what was happening to her. The thing she did realise was what

was happening to the spirit of her friend. I saw a look of anxiety cross her face when the three of them were together, and I also saw the look of anxiety returned by Marion. Each was mentally asking the other: "Do you really like Owen?" and each was asking herself: "What shall I do?"

What was passing in Edith's mind she betrayed one day when we were discussing at dinner the case that had appeared in the paper of a woman who had eloped with her best friend's husband.

"Oh," cried Edith, "I can't imagine anything worse, anything more awful in the world! Think what it must be to deal such a blow to a woman who loves and trusts you!"

"Pooh!" said Jimmie. "Girls are always trying to swipe other girls' beaux; that's what they live for."

"They don't, Jimmie Preston!" cried Edith hotly. "Not nice girls." And I saw her whole body tremble.

"Well, I notice you were mad as a hornet when Belle Mather came up to you and got herself introduced to Owen. Any one could tell you were both hopping!"

"I didn't mind introducing her to Owen, and you know it!" flashed Edith. "I minded any one of my own sex planting herself in other people's way just to get an introduction. If she had asked

me to introduce him, I would have fixed it if I could."

"Oh, yes, you would!" said Jimmie.

"Any nice girl," said Edith, going back to the subject at hand, "would suffer *horribly* at having the least part of the affection that belonged to another woman, and especially if it were her friend."

"Well," said Osborn brutally, "you don't need to worry, Ede."

Edith flushed hotly, but said nothing: and I felt rather angry with Osborn, for there was no need of saying to Edith, "Both of you two girls' hearts are touched about a fellow who doesn't care a penny for you more than to be your good chum."

CHAPTER LVIII

I WAS in the kitchen one morning soon after this ordering the meals for the day when the Dobles' cart drew up to the door and delivered groceries. Seraphy watched the boy until he mounted his cart again, then she jerked her thumb backward over her shoulder.

"'Tain't no affair of mine," she announced, "but keep your eye peeled, Mis' Preston—just keep your eye peeled."

"What are you talking about, Seraphy?" I asked. "I thought Doble was perfectly satisfactory."

"I ain't talkin' about groceries," said she, "nor ole Doble; there's more Dobles than one, and I guess I wasn't born yesterday, and I know sheep's eyes when I sees 'em. 'Twasn't fur nothin' that I waited on Edith and Osborn and that there Berenice Doble yesterday afternoon and made 'em chocolate, and the second girl in the house all the time! I seen her asking Osborn's opinion about dogs and her raised in a kennel. I know what that means! And what have so many young ladies come runnin' to the house fur anyway, these days, Mis' Preston? Seems to me, Edith's gettin' a

lot of young lady friends, all of a sudden! Seems to me there's lots of young ladies bein' more interested in your flower garden, Mis' Preston, than they used to be!"

And, indeed, I have had lately this experience that I suppose happens to all mothers who have good-looking sons: there comes a time when suddenly you find yourself sought after by various young ladies who have hitherto ignored your existence. They come to call; they ask your opinion about books; they interest themselves in your little hobbies with an artlessness that is rather touching.

I am not enough of a fool to imagine that every girl who looks at my boy falls in love with him, but I do know that a boy who can ask girls to dances and ball games is, of course, run after, and it is much to Osborn's credit that he has never noticed it. But *I* have and I didn't need Seraphy to point it out to me.

That afternoon Maria and I were sitting in the back library when the telephone bell rang, and Maria, who was expecting to hear from a friend of hers, answered it. I heard her say:

"Yes—oh, yes, Berenice, I'll tell him about it. It's too bad you should be bothered. Oh, it's very nice of you to take it that way, but I know exactly. Oh, you needn't tell me. I know how your

mother feels to have a muddy¹ dog come tracking through her nice, clean house."

"That was Berenice Doble," said Maria. "Osborn's horrid dog has run away and come right to her house."

"Oh, he ran away, did he?" said I.

"It's odd he should have gone right to Berenice's house," said Maria.

"Very odd," said I dryly.

"Well, she wants Osborn to come and get him."

"And that's odd, too," said I.

"I don't think it's odd at all," replied Maria. "I should think they'd all want that dog removed as soon as possible. It's always been a great trial to me that we couldn't keep Piker at home. It's just like hens or anything else—if you have them, keep them to yourself. And, you know, Editha, Piker's never held anybody's flower garden sacred. I suppose there isn't a flower garden for miles around that Piker hasn't buried our bones in; and you know, Editha, that it's exactly as if the wrath of God had passed over when Piker has gone through a flower bed. And now this dog is beginning the same business over again. It's very mortifying."

It didn't mortify me. I may be unjust, but I would be willing to wager that the setter pup

never ran away at all; or, at least, never ran to Berenice's house.

"Berenice Doble is a very nice, refined girl," Maria went on. "She's so feminine. I think she's a very good companion for Edith; and she's so pleasant and respectful to older people. I think she does Mrs. Doble's upbringing great credit."

"Pooh!" said I, "Maria, she isn't any more feminine than any other girl. She's a great, big, wholesome, strapping, twenty-six-inched waist, five-foot-eight girl."

"She has sweet, pretty, feminine ways; I don't care what the size of her waist is. It isn't the size of people's waists that decides how feminine they are, Editha. Neither your waist nor mine measures the same as when we were girls, and I hope we are no less feminine than we were then."

The next morning Seraphy appeared to me.

"I wish you'd come down and take a peek into my kitchen, Mis' Preston, and see what's settin' under the table. As sure as you're alive, it's the setter pup, large as life and Doble's man that's bringing him. He run away again, and you needn't tell me they don't feed him at Doble's, I know better! I know when a dog's bein' fed and when he ain't bein' fed. Feedin' of him up to her place is what *she* is, and makin' of him. And Osborn's a starvin' of him and a trainin' of him,

and he don't know no more about trainin' a pup than me nor you, Mis' Preston, and he thinks he knows everything, 'cause he can play baseball. I've seen it done all kinds of ways at my time of life," went on Seraphy, "but this beats Ned! I never seen 'em use a setter pup!"

The setter pup's preference for Berenice got to be a standing joke in our family, and during the next month the dog was exchanged between the Dobles' and our house and the college almost daily. By the end of this time, if there was any doubt in other people's minds as to whom that dog belonged, there was no doubt in the mind of the dog, for I met him uptown, looking quite sleek and handsome, following Berenice Doble. He had on a fine new collar with a license on it, and it was decorated with a large bow in the colours of Osborn's college. And it was no secret to me that Osborn invited Berenice to go to ball games, and when he went to fetch his dog on its daily excursions to the Doble house, it took him the entire evening to bring it away.

CHAPTER LIX

THERE are times when all one's children worry one all at once. I had Edith and Osborn to think of and had also been sure for some time that there had been influences at work in Jimmie's life about which I knew nothing; and yet I had little enough to go on to support this theory—nothing but a subtle change in Jimmie's manner, a few intonations of speech whose origin I couldn't trace, and the fact that he was getting harder to keep at home, which I couldn't but admit was natural for a boy of his age. Still, little as appeared to the eye, I was sure that there was some unknown element moulding him, and it is the unknown element in a child, for which no mother can account, that worries her. It is a bad day for her when she realises that any casual outsider may upset her training; may count for more in the life of her child than all her influence can possibly do.

I was wandering along this train of thought instead of getting ready for a tea-party for Osborn that afternoon, when my reverie was broken into by a little boy. He was indescribably foreign. His straight black hair hung about his

eyes. As I looked at him he glittered enormous black eyes at me.

"What do you want?" I asked him.

In a wheedling tone he replied: "Jimmie."

"Jimmie isn't here," I said. "Do you want to wait?"

"No," he answered, and would have been off. I would have been glad to keep him. I wanted to know more about the wheedling tone.

"You are not an American?" I asked him.

"Oh, yes," he answered, "but my father is out of Hungary." Then, with a dexterity unknown to the Anglo-Saxon child, he eluded me.

I went out to the kitchen where Seraphy was grumbling about Dobles and Edith's young men and, as I paid no attention to her confused mumblings, she concluded:

"An' talkin' of limbs, th' worst o' th' kit an' bilin' of 'em's settin' there at this blessed minit."

I looked out of the window. There sat the child who had been looking for Jimmie. He flashed at me a dazzling smile in recognition.

The guests had just arrived when Seraphy came to me saying in a stage whisper:

"Ain't it enough, Mis' Preston, that I got a tea-party on me hands without me bein' stung to death!"

"Stung to death?" I asked.

“Yes’m: that’s what I said. Jimmie an’ that black-hearted Finsky boy’s got th’ hose turned on a bees’ nest. ‘Get out o’ here!’ says I to ’em. ‘You’re drivin’ the bees in on me.’ ‘O, beware the bees,’ says Jimmie, laughin’, an’ the other don’t say nothin’—it’s th’ unchancy, glancin’ eye o’ him I can’t abide. So I cum right up to you, Mis’ Preston—an’ Osborn an’ his friends waitin’ f’r tea on the piazzzy! It’s no day f’r me to get all stung up!”

I went down and stopped the boys. I had only to look at Finsky to realize that peace had fled. His eyes glittered; he looked the spirit of uncontrollable mischief—and Jimmie, standing by, looked like a capable head to carry out the spirit’s desires.

Everything was going well. The young people were dancing, Edith with Owen Greave, when all of a sudden there was a wish-s-sh from the hose, a noise of the angry humming of hornets as a crowd of the angry insects stormed down on us, driven from their home by the well-directed spray. Then I beheld a singular little incident. There was a sudden stampede.

Edith and Owen stopped dancing. They looked at each other as though measuring one another’s pluck. I knew that in the back of Edith’s head lay the idea—“I will not let Jimmie spoil

this dance." They smiled at each other and kept on dancing alone on the piazza, invulnerable, the hornets buzzing about them.

I could see an expression of interest and admiration in Owen's eyes, different from his former placid friendliness. He looked at Edith as though he had never seen her before and she flushed under his gaze. Every one else had run nimbly around the side of the house. I saw Osborn clap his hand to his mouth with a muttered exclamation, while one of the girls cried:

"Is any one stung?" At the same time muffled and derisive laughter came to our ears.

"No one but me, luckily," responded Osborn, taking his hand from his mouth, which even in this short time had swelled dreadfully, giving his face such a grotesque appearance that Berenice burst out laughing and apologised for it in the same breath.

It was this laugh which was accountable for that which happened next, for between the bushes gleamed the face of the Finsky boy. Seeing him, Osborn sprang to the piazza rail, caught him and, turning him over his knee, spanked him soundly with his hard, athletic hand. He stood there imposing and dignified, head of the tribe—a boy used by his position as captain of the ball team to command others, and yet with his mouth

swelled to such a terrific size his dignity sat oddly upon him. Laughter rippled among the girls, suppressed at first, then louder, and at last a great burst of it, Berenice's voice dominating it.

The task of entertaining the tea-party fell on Edith, which she did as though she were an experienced hand. It was a successful party; there was a spirit of gaiety in it: the barriers were down. Every one enjoyed it but poor Osborn, whose troubles were not yet over.

Before the guests had left there came a ring at the front door. A huge man, attended by what we call in our town the constable, presented himself. His black hair hung over his ears; his black, glittering eyes flashed fire. It was the father of the Finsky boy.

I will not attempt to give the dialect in which he recited his wrongs. The substance of it was that he had a boy who, since he had met Jimmie, was a devil; but devil or angel, he was living in a free country, and if there was any spanking to be done, he proposed to do it himself.

"Ma'am," he finished, "that Jimmie is a bad boy. You spank him every day for long, maybe he get better."

Osborn was back by supper time.

"They fined me five dollars," he said.

Seraphy was hovering around the table. "Five

dollars, is it?" said she, "Five dollars is all! Had I known it was only five dollars it cost, 'tis th' grand lambastin' that limb of Satan would have got off me long ago—him pullin' Jimmie into all sorts of mischief!"

"Let me tell you," said Osborn, turning to Jimmie, "If you ever spoil one of Edith's or my parties again it'll be the worse for you, young man. Spanking *you* won't cost five dollars! I've a good mind to do it, anyway."

"Oh, let bygones be bygones," said Edith. "You'd not be nearly so mad if some one else had got stung. Every one but you had a good time. It broke the ice." There was a heightened colour to her cheeks, a gallant carriage to her head; she had all the triumph of having gotten away with a difficult situation and also of having established her friendship with Owen, since she had pluck and resourcefulness. I went to bed meditating on the strange ways of Providence who, through the deviltry of an Hungarian boy, had given Edith the chance of showing her mettle.

CHAPTER LX

MEANWHILE, the intimacy between Edith and Berenice grew and those hours when Osborn was not at her house, Berenice was at ours. She, like other young ladies, interested herself in my flower garden. Nor did my detached air when she approached make the slightest impression on her. It was no surprise to me to come in and find her seated beside Maria, appealing eyes raised to her, while Maria taught her the new stitch of Italian embroidery.

Osborn's state of mind, too, was obvious to me. Falling in love affects people in different ways. Some become morose and disagreeable, but this experience has always had an exhilarating effect upon Osborn; he gets more and more high-spirited and swings along as if he owned the world. As Seraphy says, "You can tell just be the set of Osborn's coat when he's got a new girl."

Then suddenly Osborn's mood changed. He sat around gloomily. I wondered if Berenice was treating him badly. For a week he was sunk in gloom, then one day he came to my room and fidgeted around the way he does when he has something on his mind.

"We licked 'em to-day," he announced. Then he shifted on his other foot.

I replied that I was very glad of that, and waited.

"I guess it's going to be a good day for practice to-morrow," he went on.

I replied it looked like it, and still waited. Ever since he has been a little boy he has always approached anything he had to tell me in this embarrassed way, and he seemed to me no older than he was at six years when he would talk of irrelevant things and then make a final rush and come to the point. So any mother can imagine my feelings, when, with a gulp, what he had to tell me finally came.

"Mother," he said, "I want you to know before anybody else, and I know you'll be glad, you are such good friends—I'm—engaged—I'm engaged to Berenice Doble. I-I know I'm k-kind of young and all that sort of thing——" He seemed far from happy; rather as though he heard his own words with deep disbelief.

But here I am glad to say I had good sense enough to put my arms around him and kiss him. Then I sat down and talked to him. I told him that marriage was a very serious thing and lasted a long time, and that I thought Berenice was a sweet, dear girl—and I suppose she is, for those

who like her—and that I thought, too, he would agree with me that it would be better to keep the engagement a secret for a while anyway. By all of which you can see that I was working for time. Then I went up to my room and locked myself in and had a good cry.

My Osborn engaged to that bird-shooting, trout-fishing minx! I saw Mr. and Mrs. Doble seated at our family table. I saw all the other Dobles overrunning us, and I thanked God that Osborn was only a freshman in college, and unless I opposed them and they ran away, that he would have plenty of time in which to get over it. Oh, I wished at that moment that we lived in some enlightened country where children have to ask their parents' consent about getting married, and where it isn't so fatally easy for young people to see each other! I was just drying my eyes and putting my hair straight when a knock came on my door and our second girl announced: "It's Mrs. Doble."

I went down to the drawing-room and found Berenice's mother seated there. She is a large, placid woman, and has none of the sporting tastes of her daughter or her husband. Her round face has always made me think of a pie just ready for the oven. She was dressed in a princess gown which displayed all her ample curves to advan-

tage and wore a perfectly fresh pair of white kid gloves. Upon her hat rested bunches of cherries that must have been made after the design of Mr. Burbank's most approved model.

"Mrs. Preston," said she, "I'm not going to do any beating round the bush, and I'm not going to pretend that I haven't come for what I've come to talk about! I don't know if Osborn's told you, but if he hasn't, it's time somebody did. Him and—oh, Mrs. Preston, him and my Berenice have gotten engaged! I tell you when Berenice told me it knocked me all of a heap! I never did approve of your son's coming to my house like he's been doing—but, there, you know what young folks are and I didn't put my foot in it.

"And, then, there was that dog! 'For the land's sake,' I've said to Berenice a million times, if I have once, 'make Osborn Preston stop bringing that dog to my house!' Why, Mrs. Preston, I'm fairly et out of house and home, what with Mr. Doble's dogs and all. I like a dog as well as anybody, but I like a dog in its proper place, and that setter dog of Osborn's hain't any idea what the proper place for a dog *is*.

"I don't know if you know it, but I do, that when he's home and in college with Osborn he sleeps on the foot of Osborn's bed, and I'll tell you how I know it—by tracks of muddy paws

I've found on Berenice's bed. I never seen such a dog for impudence! You'd think he had a mortgage on my house to see him come runnin' in. Mr. Doble's dogs is bad enough, but we've got kennels for *them*. And I wouldn't talk so much about him if he wasn't at the bottom of it all. If Osborn hadn't ever brought him to our house, there wouldn't be all this goin's on.

"Now, Mrs. Preston, I haven't anything to say against Osborn. Osborn is a perfect gentleman; and I'm not saying anything against you, Mrs. Preston, but the thing the matter with Osborn is the way he has been brought up."

To this astonishing statement I found very little to say. I murmured something, but it did not stop my visitor's oratory. She had stopped a moment, evidently preparing for the battle, but as she saw no signs of anger in my eyes, but only bewilderment, she said more softly:

"I suppose I might have put that different—but, there, that's me all over! When I think a thing I come right out with it. Your family's worldly, Mrs. Preston! I don't mean but what you ain't fine pay customers, nor that I've got anything against you, but we don't think the same things. Osborn hasn't got principles like my young people! He dances, he plays cards, and it's driven me near crazy to see my Berenice go-

ing round with a young man no matter what his manners are, who hasn't no more consideration for Sunday than Osborn has.

"It's just about broke my heart and it just come at an awful time, for I don't know whether you noticed it or not, but our minister is certainly taken with Berenice,—and Berenice takin' up with your Osborn! That's what comes of letting girls be brought up like they were boys! But Mr. Doble he wouldn't ever listen to any reason from me, take Berenice along he would from the very first, though he's as strict principled a Baptist as ever stepped in every other kind of way. He always says to me, 'Birdie, there ain't nothing in the church against a girl's going shooting with her pa.' 'No,' says I, 'because there's never needed to be no such thing. Who ever heard of a girl going shooting, George Doble?' I said to him.

"But you know what men is! Now he can blame himself, for in every other kind of way Berenice would make a splendid minister's wife, brought up strict like she has been. Besides, what a girl like Berenice needs is a quiet husband, because—though you mightn't think it, she's got an awful strong will, she's got a will just like her pa!

"It complicates family life awful to have a girl take just after her pa and not after her mother one bit. She never took after me in nothing ex-

cept her little ways. When I was young I had little ways just like Berenice, but with a growin' family you can't have 'em any more'n any other kind of frills, and the only ray of light I've seen in this, Mrs. Preston, is that I knew you'd be just as down on it as I was. There's no mother living wants her son engaged when he's just in college, no matter how nice the girl is.

"Now, I'll tell *you*, Mrs. Preston, don't antagonize 'em. If you antagonize Berenice, she'll be so set on Osborn that a pickaxe wouldn't get her off—but just leave her lay, and like's not she'll get tired of him, which is what I'm hoping and praying for."

"That," I said, with dignity, "is just what I have been hoping and is exactly the attitude I have taken, Mrs. Doble. Osborn has told me about it, as I have not mentioned to you before."

"Well, I'm glad he come to you open and aboveboard, but I just want to say one thing, and I'm glad we view it all in the same light—it's bad enough to have Osborn engaged to Berenice without that dog tracking up my house; so I'd take it as a kindness from you if you would tell him to keep that dog at home or any other place he wants to."

I am no Machiavelli, and I confess that my

patience had been somewhat tried during Mrs. Doble's speech, for well enough I saw that this excellent woman had taken occasion to ease her mind, as the saying goes, concerning me and my ways, and had enjoyed doing it, so I would be less than human had I not replied with some stiffness :

"I think that dog would be more apt to stay away, Mrs. Doble, if Berenice did not feed it, and make such a pet of it. Your daughter, Mrs. Doble, knows a great deal more about dogs than my son, and it's at least as much her fault as it is Osborn's if he has annoyed you."

I saw a glitter of comprehension in Mrs. Doble's shrewd eyes, but not for anything was she going to confess to me that she was, as the boys say, "on" to her daughter's doings. All she said was :

"Tell Osborn to keep him at home, and we will both agree that the only thing we've got to do is not to do anything."

CHAPTER LXI

JIMMIE'S time was fully occupied for the next week in extracting the setter pup from the Doble house. Every little while the telephone bell would ring and Mrs. Doble would request me in polite terms to let some one call for the dog. We only saw each other over the telephone, but during our interviews I learned that "George was no mite of comfort," that when informed of the state of things he had only laughed and guessed "it would all come out in the wash;" which, I must confess, was a good deal Henry's point of view. He refused to take the matter seriously at all. There are times in one's life when one's husband is not the comfort that one expects he should be. What passed between him and Osborn was only this: Henry laughed at Osborn and said:

"Well, Os, I hear you're engaged." And Osborn replied sheepishly:

"I guess so, sir."

"Make a fine tackle, wouldn't she?" said Henry, and Osborn only grinned and got out of his father's way.

So things went along until one afternoon, when

Osborn was sitting on the piazza, the setter dog at his feet, he got up saying to Jimmie:

“Tie the pup up; I’m going over to Berenice’s.”

Just then the dog bounded off. I would have sworn that I had heard a whistle. He ran across the street and fell into Berenice’s arms, and she stooped over to pat him in that knowing way of hers that makes any dog follow her.

Instead of joining Berenice, Osborn stood on the steps and whistled. The dog pricked up his ears but stayed where he was. Osborn’s face flushed. He whistled again and called him in commanding tones to “come here!” The dog moved his ears deprecatingly and put his tail down, but did not obey.

“Come here, I say!” bawled Osborn, whistling again. “That dog’s got to learn who his master is,” my son informed me. “If Berenice wanted him or her mother’d let her have him, I’d give him to her; but if he’s my dog, he’s got to be my dog!”

As the dog did not move, Osborn started across the street and grasped him fairly by the collar and pulled him along behind him, Berenice following.

“Oh, Osborn!” she cried, “what are you going to do to him?”

“I’m going to give him a thrashing,” said Osborn. “That pup is the hardest pup to break I ever saw.”

"But, Osborn," Berenice begged, imploring eyes on her fiancé, "he's an awfully good dog. Oh, don't do that, Osborn!"

"I've got to break this pup now," said Osborn, obstinately. "What's the good of a setter that won't come when he's called?"

I thought I saw a little flicker of a smile around Berenice's mouth and I heard Jimmie mutter:

"He can come when he's called, all right!"

"What did you say?" Osborn demanded, turning on his younger brother.

"Ask her," said Jimmie, jerking his head toward his future sister-in-law. "She knows." Osborn chose to ignore his brother.

"Osborn," pleaded Berenice earnestly, "don't whip that dog!"

"He's my dog," said Osborn. "Let him alone, Berenice. I know what's good for him."

He spoke in the superior manner of the male. There was something in his face that aroused Berenice. Suddenly she put aside her baby ways, her eyes flamed.

"Osborn Preston," she said, "if you strike that dog I'll never speak to you again as long as I live. *You* know what is good for dogs, do you? You don't know anything more about dogs than if you were a hippopotamus. That's no way to break a

dog! You've most spoiled him anyhow; if it hadn't been for me he'd be no good!"

"Oh, so you've been breaking him?" asked Osborn.

"Sure, she has," grinned Jimmie. "Ask her!"

"Well, I have, then," exclaimed Berenice, "and I don't care who knows it! I wouldn't let a good dog go to waste for any man living, and I told pa so when he saw me feeding him."

"Oh, so you've been feeding him," said Osborn in icy tones. "You *told* me—told me without my asking you—that you never had! You needn't have *lied* to me, Berenice!"

"You'd make any one lie to you," Berenice responded, "with your overbearing ways. You think because you've been captain of everything in sight you can scare everybody to death; and you've been jealous about the dog, jealous about him all along, and if you didn't know enough about dogs to keep your own dog—you'd every bit as good a chance as I had with him, but not knowing a thing about him——" Here she went on: "Take your old ring!"

"Take your dog!" said Osborn, releasing his hand from the setter pup's collar.

Here Berenice sank down upon the piazza steps and wept. Beautiful tears rolled down her cheeks without spoiling her complexion in the least. She

was one of those few girls who can cry without making her nose red.

"Oh, Mrs. Preston!" she wailed, "I thought I could love Osborn, really and truly I thought I could, though in the beginning it was because ma was trying to shove me down the minister's throat, and I won't be shoved down any man's throat, and I won't marry anybody that doesn't know about dogs and that can't shoot like pa, and I just saw a perfectly hideous life before me being a minister's wife, and you know what ma is, and I knew she'd work around pa. And *he* was coming to the house all the time, and looking at me—you know how they look at you! And then Osborn came along, and I thought he was better than the minister, anyway, and perhaps he could learn to shoot. But I don't believe he can!" she added. "I don't believe a man who's such a fool about a good bird dog could ever learn to shoot straight! And if anybody thinks I'm going to settle down into ma when I'm married, they're just mistaken and have got guesses coming."

She sobbed comfortably for a little while. We were all silent; I patted her shoulder consolingly. At last she rose to her feet. She looked at Osborn kindly—an older woman looking at a little boy.

“Good-by, Osborn,” she said, “I guess we’ve all made a mistake.”

She put out her hand and they shook hands squarely and she went off down the street. A red shadow moved in the bushes. It was the setter dog slinking off after her.

Osborn gazed after her without speaking. A look of relief had spread itself over his features. Jimmie approached his brother.

“Let her go, Os,” he muttered. “Let her go and good riddance, and take her setter pup with her; he wasn’t no kind of a dog.”

But Osborn turned and went into the house. I heard him whistling, and it was the whistle of a man who feels himself free—free to go about the world of men as he feels like doing.

CHAPTER LXII

SHORTLY after this I saw that Edith was very much worried. She sat with me more than was her custom, and talked about abstract things like ethics. She would let fall nuggets of wisdom like:

“It’s awfully hard to know what to do in this world, isn’t it? Supposing a person had to hurt one friend or hurt another—it’s very difficult to choose.”

“Indeed it is,” said I gravely, for the platitudes handed out to us by our children are often fresh-minted discoveries of their own in the game of life.

I fancied what was troubling her was the thought that she was thrown more with Owen than her friend was, because, of course, when the quartette paired off (now with Berenice no longer there), Marion went with Osborn and Edith with Owen; besides Owen’s attitude had been different toward Edith ever since the party.

Then one day Edith came into the house limping.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“Oh, I think I’ve just turned my foot over a

little. It isn't anything. If you'll send Seraphy up with some hot water, I'll bandage it."

"Why, I'll do it," I said.

"I'd much rather have Seraphy," she said. There was an air of excitement about her and her face was flushed.

Soon Seraphy came to me. "Whisht!" she said. "Don't you worry none about Edith's fut."

"I'm not worrying," said I.

"Don't you worry *none*," repeated Seraphy, "it'll be worse to-morrow; Edith won't want to step on it. But don't you go sendin' for no doctor."

"Why, what's the matter?" said I.

"There ain't nothin' the matter," said Seraphy. "Nothin' at all there is the matter with Edith's foot. She's a quare one. 'I want to pretend me fut's hurt,' says she to me. 'An' ain't it?' says I. 'Nary a bit,' says she. 'Before you go playin' any shenanigan on your ma an' your Aunt Mariar, who'll come buzzin' around me like the hornets, I want to know what's up,' says I. 'I'll tell you, Seraphy,' says she, 'if you'll swear to tell no one.' An' I did, but I'll tell you so you won't be worriting an' sendin' for th' doctor.

"It's that young gentleman, Mr. Greave, has been askin' of Edith to go to the ball-game, an' she's pretendin' to have her fut hurt, so she can't

go with him, an' all because of her not wantin' to hurt the feelin's of her friend, Marion Tracy.

"'Small thanks you'll get for that,' says I. 'She'd not do that for you,' says I. 'I think she's fond of him,' says Edith, lookin' at me with her big eyes. 'I think she'd be hurt because he axed me and not her.' 'Well,' says I, 'a young gentleman can't be axin' ev'ry young girl he knows to go to the ball-game wid him, so of course he axes the girl he likes——' 'Oh,' says she, 'wouldn't it be awful if he should like me better'n Marion?' 'Why, don't you like him?' says I. An' then she flushed as red as a pi'ny."

"'If he liked Marion better'n me,' says she, 'she'd feel that bad; you don't know the heart of her. She's the noblest girl that ever stepped on the face of the earth.' 'Huh!' says I. 'She's not like you,' says I. 'There ain't many'd be throwin' down a fine young man like that on account o' hurtin' her friend's feelin's.' 'Marion would do just as much for me,' says she, real firm.

"'So, there you are, Mis' Preston, an' that's what's ailin' Edith. It's a fine sperrit she's got, if she is a fool. It's postin' a letter I am to him this minute, ma'am, all unbeknownst to you. It's a fool angel Edith is, even though her wings is covered wid chestnut burrs instid o' feathers."

For the next twenty-four hours I played out

Edith's little comedy. Marion was, of course, with Edith a great deal, and was very sympathetic, urging me to get a doctor. The next day she rushed in, radiant. Edith had managed with difficulty to get down-stairs, and was sitting on the piazza, reading. I was inside the parlour window.

"Oh, Ede," said she, "Owen has asked me to go to the ball-game! Isn't it lovely?"

I couldn't see Edith's face, but her voice was quiet and even.

"Is that so?" she said. "Are you going?"

"Why," said Marion, "of course I'm going. I only wish you were too, you old dear. If you hadn't a bad foot, I'm sure he'd have asked us both." There was a note of complacency in her voice, however, that showed how very unsure she was of this.

Edith bore with her friend's jubilation nobly, but after Marion had gone, she moved up painfully to her room and sent down word that her foot hurt her and she wouldn't be down for supper. So afterwards I went up to see how she was. She was sitting deep in thought, inclined for cynical discussion of the world, and behind the things she said I saw she was very wistful and lonely. Somehow, she told me, life wasn't what it seemed to be; you felt yourself one with a per-

son, and then you found out that they felt different from you, and then you found out that there was no real understanding at all.

I saw that she was face to face with the realization that almost all young people must suffer with sooner or later—the realization of our own immense isolation. Some people never get over grieving for this, but the lives of most of us are too full for us to consider ourselves majestically seated upon a solitary mountain-peak.

Immediately after the ball-game, Marion, as she had promised, came to see Edith. Her visit was short, and I noticed that she was unusually dignified as she went out. After she had left, Edith came to me. She wasn't limping any more.

"Mother," she said, "I think I ought to tell you something. I haven't hurt my foot at all; I pretended to because Owen asked me to go to the ball-game, and I thought it would hurt Marion's feelings. Very likely you know about it, anyway; I suppose Seraphy's told you, hasn't she? There's no use in trusting anybody——"

"What's the matter, dear?" said I.

"Oh, nothing," she said. "Only Marion found out that Owen had asked me first, and she *reproached* me—*me*—for not having told her. She said she had found out that I was keeping some-

thing from her, and that we were evidently not as close together as she supposed——”

“Why, do you have to tell Marion everything?” I asked.

“We have no thoughts away from each other—or we supposed that we didn’t—and now I have found out that I have a whole gamut of thoughts that Marion never had. And now I shall never, never tell her about my foot—that it really wasn’t hurt at all. He let it out—he let it out just as naïvely as anything. He said that Osborn had intended to ask her, and then when my foot was hurt, Os said: ‘Why don’t you take Marion, Owen, and I’ll take Stella Beekman, and we can be four just the same?’ And at the game, anyway, she didn’t get much satisfaction,” my daughter added with a touch of spite, “because that little simpleton, Belle Mather, happened to be sitting on the other side of Owen and monopolised him half the time and paid no attention to her own escort, who was nothing but a high-school boy, anyway. And just as distinctly as anything in the world, Marion heard her say, ‘Marion and Edith thnubbed me!’ ”

Seraphy appeared at the door.

“It’s Mr. Greave come to ask for your fut, Edith,” she said.

At this Edith got up with a run. She checked

herself and looked at me. Her face flushed and she turned to the glass. I saw her in the mirror and caught the bright contagion of her smile. Then she grinned at me and turning on me a look which had in it gaiety and triumph and a touch of self-consciousness, she limped past me. There was a soft radiance about her that made my heart ache. I watched her down the stairs and saw her go helping herself along elaborately.

Seraphy turned to me. There was laughter in her face and something rueful as well.

"It's mighty grown-up is Edith," she remarked, and went her way.

I sat there by myself, Seraphy's words echoing themselves over and over in my heart. "It's mighty grown-up is Edith." A woman, very competent of taking care of herself, she had seemed the day when she had marshalled victory out of disaster, when she had been able to defy Jimmie's deviltries and Osborn's humiliation. She had been able to defy everything, even to a storm of yellow jackets. A very grown-up person indeed, a woman, in fact, had gone downstairs with her prevaricating limp. That girl would never have sudden recrudescences into childhood. She would never throw a half-brick in defence of her brother again, or run yapping shrilly after Jimmie.

An icy wind seemed to sweep over me as if from the door of some cold place and I knew that that wind was the precursor of the isolation of old age. Osborn old enough to be engaged, even if it was only the engagement of an hour, and Edith going out on an adventure of the spirit! They found me old-fashioned; I saw myself *mother*, beloved, a little absurd, and left out from the circle of their vivid interests. A picture of Osborn and Edith came to me, Edith hanging on to Osborn's arm and looking up into his face and chattering gladly to him of the things I wanted so much to hear about—things I never would hear perhaps.

Far off I heard a noise of disaster. Something noisy and tinny clattering downstairs and shrill expostulation from Seraphy and a familiar voice: "Well, I couldn't help it, could I?"

It was Jimmie in trouble again! My heart leaped up. Thank God for that! The cold searching wind of isolation ceased.

"I'm going right to your mother!" came Seraphy's voice.

"I'll get there first!" cried Jimmie.

I heard their welcome and familiar gallopings, and then Henry's irritated voice:

"What's all this about?" His tone had the aggrieved note of a man who comes home to find

his house in the throes of some domestic upheaval.

The mist of the afternoon vanished like a bad dream. There were some things in my life that had not grown away. I shook from me that pusillanimous hatred of change that assails mothers.

"They don't leave us unless we let them," I thought. Somehow, this commonplace seemed to me like a basic truth, a sudden flash of insight.

Jimmie caught sight of me. "Mother, can't I?" he cried.

With the joyfulness of one coming home from some desolate country I went downstairs to the familiar task of meeting his difficulty and of smoothing out Henry.

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